

MATHILDE BLIND'S THE ASCENT OF MAN:
A CASE STUDY OF THE INTELLECTUAL
HISTORY, COMPOSITION, PUBLICATION,
RECEPTION HISTORY AND RECOVERY OF A LATE
NINETEENTH-CENTURY VOLUME OF POETRY

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a case study of Mathilde Blind's (1841-1896) volume of poetry *The Ascent of Man* (1889) which focuses on the volume's intellectual history, composition, publication, and reception history, including its recent recovery by critics and scholars. Its aim is to ascertain the extent to which this kind of approach, usually reserved for canonical male writers, can produce new insights into the work of late-nineteenth-century women poets. It relies heavily on previously unpublished archival material held at the British Library, the Bodleian Library, the library of the University of Reading, and the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center of The University of Texas at Austin, which together shed light on previously unknown aspects of Blind's work in general and *The Ascent of Man* in particular. The introduction to the thesis provides an overview of recovery studies and related issues, archival sources, the current state of research on Blind and *The Ascent of Man*, as well as explaining the reasons for the decision to focus on this volume. The first chapter dwells on the intellectual origins of the volume, including the ideas that shaped Blind's worldview, affected her poetical sensibilities and had a direct effect on the ideas expressed in the volume. Chapter two looks at the material relating to the composition, production and advertising of the volume, establishing a timeline for *The Ascent of Man* and, where possible, the sequence of changes to the text between manuscript and publication, as well as exploring Blind's working relationship with her publisher, Chatto and Windus. The final chapter investigates the reception of the volume, including posthumous reviews, with the aim of tracing the changes in its reputation and determining the reasons for Blind's disappearance for most of the twentieth century.

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Introduction: Mathilde Blind, *The Ascent of Man* and Recovery

Recovery ... is a re-gaining—regaining of a clear view. I do not say “seeing things as they are” and involve myself with the philosophers, though I might venture to say “seeing things as we are (or were) meant to see them”—as things apart from ourselves.

‘On Fairy Stories’

J.R.R. Tolkien

Each day he would look up in the doctor's face to discover how long he should live. He would say, "how long will this posthumous life of mine last?" That look was more than we could ever bear. The extreme brightness of his eyes, with his poor pallid face, were not earthly.¹

This extract from Joseph Severn's letter to John Taylor, which speaks of the last days of Keats's life, is often used to address the posterity of poets and their works. An example can be seen in Robert Douglas-Fairhurst's book *Victorian Afterlives: The Shaping of Influence in Nineteenth-century Literature*, which uses this quotation to open its discussion of writers' heritages and the ways in which they interact with each other. The question of an author's posthumous life and the issues connected with this are at the heart of recovery studies.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the most typical uses of "recovery" are connected with the '[s]enses relating to gaining or regaining possession, esp. of something lost or taken away'; what is more, these meanings 'relat[e] primarily to immaterial things.'² 'Regaining possession' or, as Tolkien put it, 'regaining of a clear view', is at the core of what most of the recovery studies aim to do: give a voice to previously under-represented authors, who were neglected for a variety of reasons including gender, class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. This process, as Steven J. Belluscio notes, 'begins with an eerie silence.'³ He exemplifies this by referring to Alice Walker whose interest in recovery 'began after graduating ... and realizing that she had encountered no early African American women writers in her education.'⁴

¹ Letter from Joseph Severn to John Taylor 6 march 1821, in John Keats, *Selected Letters of John Keats*, ed. Grant F. Scott (Cambridge, MA, London: Harvard University press, 2002, revised ed.), pp. 510-2, p. 511.

² 'Recovery, I', *Oxford English Dictionary*, www.oed.com, accessed on 15/10/2016.

³ Steven J. Belluscio, *To Be Suddenly White: Literary Realism and Racial Passing* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006), p. 248.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 248.

Regarding the recovery of Victorian women poets, the last three decades have seen a number of projects aiming to recover missing voices. These years saw the publication of several studies formative for the development of the field, with one of the ground-breaking books being Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979). Amongst other notable works that pursued this cause are Ellen Moer's *Literary Women* (1963), Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* (1977), Angela Leighton's book devoted to the lives of women poets *Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against the Heart* (1992), and a collection of essays edited by Isobel Armstrong and Virginia Blain, *Women's Poetry, Late Romantic to Late Victorian: Gender and Genre, 1830-1900*, published in 1999.⁵

Armstrong and Blain's preface to the last of the works mentioned above contains a comment that sums up the state of recovery up to the time when their collection was published. Observing the variety of themes and authors covered in the essays as well as referring back to the 'Rethinking Women's Poetry 1730-1930' conference which preceded this volume, Armstrong and Blain note that there are 'more papers on single authors ... than [on] theoretical approaches'.⁶ For example, the volume contains essays on the works of such poets as Amy Levy, Caroline Norton, Felicia Hemans, Emily Pfeiffer and Christina Rossetti. Such focus on individual authors, according to Armstrong and Blain, implies 'that each poet demands a discrete form of analysis', with essays 'exploring how poets evolved unique, sometimes idiosyncratic discourses, athwart or

⁵ Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963).
Angela Leighton, *Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against the Heart* (New York; London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992).

Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997).

Isobel Armstrong and Virginia Blain (eds), *Women's Poetry, Late Romantic to late Victorian: Gender and Genre, 1830-1900* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1999).

⁶ Isobel Armstrong and Virginia Blain, 'Preface', *Gender and Genre* pp. viii-xiv, p. ix.

oblique to cultural norms and expectations.’⁷ Another element that stands out in this collection is that a number of articles group the poets either according to the themes in their works or other elements that unite these authors including science, religion, national identity or sexuality. This suggests that at the time Armstrong and Blain wrote their introduction the field had surpassed the initial development stage that identifies the “key players” and moved on to begin to establish a broader and more inclusive context for the investigation.

The following two decades demonstrate growing interest and attention to previously forgotten authors. As Lyn Pykett observes, during the past three decades a considerable number of previously forgotten women authors ‘working in a range of forms and genres have been restored to view’ and mentions a number of issues such as ‘feminism, socialism, ..., eugenics, class’ that are used in the explorations of ‘their [women poet’s] lives and works’.⁸ Pykett’s essay provides a reasonably comprehensive overview of the development of the field of Victorian Women’s poetry. From her observations as well as from surveying a number of similar sources we can observe that even if the studies emphasise different aspects of the recovered poets’ work, questions of gender and of literary and cultural tradition are still seen as dominant factors in the discussion of the poems.

Before moving on to the more detailed discussion of the challenges connected to the issues above it is apt to give some examples of other fields of recovery research. In order to understand the logic of recovery research, this introduction will draw on more than just one field, which also gives an opportunity to draw on commonalities or

⁷ Ibid., p. ix.

⁸ Lyn Pykett, ‘Re-Writing Women Writers of the *Fin de Siècle*: Recent Critical Trends’, in *Writing Women of the Fin de Siècle: Authors of Change*, ed. Adrienne E. Gavin, Carolyn W. de la L. Oulton (Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 15-27, p.16

differences in approaching recovery if such will be observed. An example that is not too far from the subject matter of this thesis is the rediscovery of Victorian women's autobiography that was, according to Linda H. Peterson, undertaken during the last two decades of the twentieth century with the purpose of 'reviving lost or forgotten women's texts ... posing ... literary questions about gender and genre, [and] ... more general questions about women's self-representation.'⁹ Looking at a number of recovery studies we see that the self-representation question as well as gender and genre related issues are typical of the recovery studies aimed at previously underrepresented groups of authors. A notable example of such type of study is the twelve-volume *Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage*, published from 1993 by Arte Público Press, Houston. Because of the longevity of this series it presents a number of elements to focus on for recovering a field; for instance, an overview of a particular section of Hispanic culture within the larger context of North American culture and the focus on how a minority group within U.S. Hispanic literature employed a literary genre such as poetry. These, of course, are not the only ways to approach lost voices; the volumes also include multi- and single-author studies, single work studies, attempts to recover authors through their autobiographies and publications in periodicals. Other cases of recovery studies are Maria Caridad Casas' *Multimodality in Canadian Black Feminist Writing: Orality and the Body in the Work of Harris, Philip, Allen, and Brand* and Paula C. Madden's *African Nova Scotian-Mi'kmaw Relations*, both of which, according to Veronica Austen, 'seek to explore cultural situations and literary forms that traditionally have been undervalued in discussions of race within Canadian studies.'¹⁰ Speaking of the prominent studies of

⁹ Linda H. Peterson, *Traditions of Victorian Women's Autobiography the Poetics and Politics of Life Writing* (Charlottesville, London: University Press of Virginia, 1999), p. 1.

¹⁰ Veronica Austen, 'Recovery and Revaluation', *Canadian Literature/Littérature Canadienne: a Quarterly of Criticism and Review*, Spring 2011:208, 174-176, 174.

recovery of English poetry we can name John Goodridge's *Nineteenth-Century English Labouring-Class Poets* (2006) published in three volumes, which Florence S. Boos describes as 'a test for generalizations about working-class literature of the period as well as its "quality", and helps to answer questions about the range and volume of working-class poetry published at mid-century.'¹¹

There is, however, an element that unites these studies and existing recovery work on Victorian women poets, including the ones mentioned by Pykett. Most of them approach the forgotten voices through such elements as gender, class or race. What is more, the works and the authors examined are predominantly looked at in the context of a separate tradition, which is not always the most beneficial approach and, as Peterson notes in relation to Victorian authors, the argument for using a separate tradition in exploring women authors is 'worth reexamining not simply because ... it misrepresents a significant number of Victorian women's texts but because it involves a blindness about the writing of literary history, an unself-consciousness about what scholars do when they reconstruct a literary tradition.'¹² A similar point is discussed in Nicola Diane Thompson's work on non-canonical women novelists. She notes that even if their gain in critical attention during the past decades is connected with 'the rise of feminist criticism', their works have not been thoroughly explored.¹³ These observations suggest that it is worth exercising caution determining how to approach Blind and her work without isolating her poetry from the larger context of the period by, for example, exclusively focusing on the women's literary tradition.

¹¹ Florence S. Boos, 'Introduction' in *Working-Class Women Poets in Victorian Britain: An Anthology* ed. Florence S. Boos (Broadview Press on Google Play, 2008) p. 16. n. 1.

¹² Peterson, p. 2.

¹³ Nicola Diane Thompson, 'Responding to the woman question: rereading noncanonical Victorian women novelists', in *Victorian Women Writers and the Woman Question*, ed. N. D. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 1-23, p. 11.

A comparable point is raised by Marion Thain and Ana Parejo Vadillo, who note pros and cons to using “Victorian” as an umbrella term to describe a plethora of different poets: ‘there is no doubt that examining women’s poetry under the term “Victorian” has successfully facilitated – and continues to facilitate – the study and teaching of late-nineteenth-century women’s poetry.’¹⁴ However, they also note that the use of a broad term comes with inherent issues: it obstructs ‘some of women poets’ most deeply felt concerns about the challenges and promises of the period.’¹⁵ What is more, they observe that the label ‘women’s poetry’ is also problematic as ‘[t]he coherence of this grouping tends to rely on an exploration of a shared womanly poetic identity.’¹⁶ Indeed, as soon as we question the homogeneity of the field of Victorian women’s poetry it becomes apparent that to thoroughly investigate these authors we need to see them as a part of greater literary and cultural history rather than put the gender-related aspects into the foreground.

Six years after the essay by Thain and Vadillo was published, Lee Christine O’Brien still felt the need to note that looking at these poets as part of a narrower tradition ‘can foster ways of reading poems that merely reproduce, at the level of analysis, historical constraints and binaries which deflect other readings that suggest that competence and autonomy thrive within the palimpsestic structures of poetic language.’¹⁷ However, at the same time she also argues that her work on women’s poetry is ‘situated in what may be deemed the post-recovery field of Victorian poetry’ as during the past few decades ‘the writing of a large number of new poets has become available for critical

¹⁴ Marion Thain and Anna Parejo Vadillo ‘Introduction. Fin-de-siècle Renaissance: Diversity, History, Modernity’, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 34:2 (2006), 389–403, 389-90.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 390.

¹⁶ Thain, Vadillo, 392.

¹⁷ Lee Christine O’Brien, *The Romance of the Lyric in Nineteenth-Century Women’s Poetry: Experiments in Form* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2012), p. xv.

assessment.’¹⁸ Even so, she pauses on an issue connected with the category “women’s poetry”: this term ‘indicates an origin, rather than an endpoint. It is a corpus that is full of complexity and creative experimentation.’¹⁹ This suggests that these poets are still seen through a gender-influenced framework and consequently, especially in the case of non-canonical authors, treated accordingly.

There is undoubtedly a difference in the way an established canonical author and someone who is still being recovered are treated by critics and scholars. Even if O’Brien describes the field as ‘post-recover[y]’, this can be applied only to those authors whose recovery coincided with the time the field was established. One example is Elizabeth Barrett Browning, who, according to Simon Avery, was brought back into the critical limelight by *The Madwoman in the Attic*. He comments that ‘Barrett Browning served as an exemplar of female authorship throughout her century and well into our own.’²⁰ Yet, as Avery points out, at the time his book on Barrett Browning was first published (2003) she was remembered more in connection with her husband than for her own poetry.²¹ We need to note that this refers to her being recognised by the wider public rather than in scholarly circles, as can be estimated through, for example, the Oxford University Press publication of *Aurora Leigh* in 1993 or numerous essays on Barrett Browning’s work. This also can be seen in Tricia Lootens’ introduction to *Lost Saints: Silence, Gender, and Victorian Literary Canonization* (1996), which comments that the idea for this book stems from not being able to find *Aurora Leigh* in her university’s library.²² In the time

¹⁸ Ibid., p. xiii.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. xv.

²⁰ Tricia A. Lootens, *Lost Saints: Silence, Gender, and Victorian Literary Canonization* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 1996), p. 2.

²¹ Simon Avery, ‘Introduction’, in Simon Avery and Rebecca Scott, *Elizabeth Barret Browning* (London: Routledge, 2014, Kindle edition), location 173. Avery based this on ‘the remnants of Barrett Browning’s existence in London’ once explored by him.

²² Lootens, p. 1.

between publication of Lootens' and Avery's books, a substantial number of essays and other critical works appeared, and 2010 saw the publication of a five-volume definitive edition of Barrett Browning's poetry.²³ The existence of a scholarly edition demonstrates that her works are now being treated with the respect they deserve, and subjected to the same kind of scholarly and critical scrutiny as the works of her male contemporaries.

Another element that we need to consider is that not all of the studies of these authors can be described as works of literary recovery. Even if their subject is an unknown or lesser-known author or work, they would be better described as critical readings as they do not uncover additional details about the author or the work in question.²⁴ This thesis, in contrast, uses the term recovery in its most direct sense to indicate an unearthing of previously hidden or ignored material. What is more, none of the surveyed essays dealing with literary recovery, unlike this thesis, approaches these works with the attention to detail typically used for canonical authors and their works.

As will be demonstrated in this chapter and throughout the body of the thesis there are some issues with the existing research on *The Ascent of Man* (1889) that are also typical issues in the field of recovery research: some of the conclusions about the intellectual background and production of the volume have been made by taking previously published information at face value rather than checking and verifying it. What is more, recovery studies often rely on poor quality modern reprints that complicate the relationship between the scholar or reader and the text. In regard to these issues it is apt to ask the same question Virginia Blain poses discussing Victorian women poets in connection with Queer Theory:

²³ Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *The Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, ed. Sandra Donaldson, Marjorie Stone and Beverly Taylor (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2010).

²⁴ Examples of such works are present throughout this thesis as they are often the ones that make mistakes when approaching lesser-known writers.

[Recent] work in queer theorising of gender issues will surely prove influential in forming new and newly perverse readings of the poetry. But the problem remains: *what* poetry? How can we form theories about a body of work as a whole when great chunks are still missing? There is still a desperate need for more recovery work.²⁵ [Blain's italics]

Even if Blain addresses the gaps of a particular segment of Victorian women's poetry, the issues brought up in the second part of her statement, in which she speaks about 'great chunks [that] are still missing' can be applied to the works of many lesser-known authors.

Existing knowledge of the key influences on Blind's poetry, the main themes and issues present in it as well as the way the poems and the volumes came together is, at present, exactly this 'missing chunk' that is needed to 'regain clarity' in our perception of her work. This then might be the reason why there are no published studies of considerable length which focus exclusively on Blind's poetry.²⁶ Indeed, apart from a number of essays that cover various aspects of her work, Blind is mostly looked at either in connection with the themes present in her work, such as evolution, or with other contemporary women poets of the same standing, such as Constance Naden or Amy Levy. Such work can be seen as providing context to Blind and her poems as well as placing it within a larger body of Victorian literature and is important for the general process of recovery. The aim of this thesis, in contrast, is to provide a well-rounded and accurate study of Blind's most important volume – *The Ascent of Man* – in a way that is usually reserved for canonical male poets, and thereby create a new precedent for dealing with 'recovered' and non-canonical authors. Hence this thesis will not only uncover forgotten elements of the volume's life through the examination of previously unpublished sources, but will also rely on original archival sources to re-examine existing information on *The*

²⁵ Blain, p. 141.

²⁶ There is one unpublished PhD thesis that speaks of Blind's poetry, however it focuses on a variety of issues present in Blind's poetry on the whole rather than focusing on a particular volume.

Ascent of Man. By doing so the thesis will increase our understanding of this volume and contribute to research in the field of Victorian poetry more broadly.

The Ascent of Man's author, Mathilde Blind (1841-96), was during her lifetime a reasonably well-recognised and respected poet whose work, like that of many of her contemporaries, ended up in limbo after the end of the nineteenth century, partly due to the 'rapid devaluating of Victorianism by the subsequent generation of modernist writers and critics of the early twentieth century.'²⁷ This critical oblivion has been reversed to a certain extent during the past two decades, yet a survey of the existing material on Blind demonstrates that there is little detailed information on the intellectual origin of her poetry as well as on its composition and production. What is more, most of the essays on Blind still include a brief overview of her life, which suggests that her recovery is still in its early stages. Exploring Blind's presence in current scholarly publications on nineteenth-century literature, we see that her name and works are most often mentioned as a part of the larger context of women's fin-de-siècle poetry, which suggests that, while she is no longer a completely unknown entity, she still forms part of the background rather than the foreground of the literature of the period.

The existing literature on Blind is not extensive, and is largely focused on biography. There are several entries in standard reference works such as the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* but there is only one study of substantial length, published in 2016: James Diedrick's *Mathilde Blind: Late Victorian Culture and the Woman of Letters* (2016), which provides an account of Blind's life in the context of the period.²⁸ As Diedrick admits himself in the introduction to the biography the book took

²⁷ Virginia Blain, 'Introduction', in *Victorian Women Poets: An Annotated Anthology*, ed. Virginia Blain (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 1-16, p. 3.

²⁸ James Diedrick, *Mathilde Blind: Late Victorian Culture and the Woman of Letters* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016, Kindle edition).

a long time to write, hence its publication cannot be seen as defining a certain stage of rediscovery of Blind's poetry; however, it does indicate presence of certain interest in Blind's persona. The key difference between Diedrick's book and this thesis is that Diedrick focuses on Blind's life in context of the period whereas this work places one particular volume, *The Ascent of Man*, at the centre of attention. Therefore, both studies are better described as complimentary rather than as being in a direct competition with each other. Biography of Blind provides a comprehensive overview of her life as well as introduces a few of the key figures in her life such as Richard Garnett or Percy Bysshe Shelley. However, Diedrick's research does not trace the effects produced by these people on Blind's poetry or include information on the processes of composition and publication, a gap which this thesis covers in relation to *The Ascent of Man*.

As there is a fairly recent biography of Blind, released towards the end of 2016, there is no need to present a detailed account of her life here. Nevertheless, it might be helpful to include a brief introduction to Blind's life at this point as she remains relatively unknown to a broader audience. Mathilde Blind was born in 1841 in Mannheim, Germany and approximately the first decade of her life was spent between Germany, her birth country, France and Belgium before the family was moved to England by her stepfather Karl Blind (1849 or 51, depending on the source). The Blinds settled in St. John's Wood, and their home soon became a gathering space for other revolutionary emigrants who lived in the neighbourhood and those whom Karl Blind came across through his journalistic endeavours and other political activities. Speaking of Mathilde Blind's early years in London, especially about the circle of people around her, we need to mention two elements about this part of London as these are important in understanding Blind's development and her desire to be seen as a part of her new culture. The first one refers to

the way German immigrants did not settle in a particular area of London: ‘unlike many other immigrant groups, the Germans were spread out over the metropolis’ with St. John’s Wood being one of the many areas of London that had a cluster of German refugees and expatriates.²⁹ Another feature of this district of London is that it was favoured by radical artists, thinkers and poets.³⁰ Thus, the mixture of different cultures in the area where Blind spent her formative years allowed her to integrate in her adopted country and affected her understanding of the world.

Apart from permanently moving to a new country, other notable events from Blind’s life during the 1850s and 60s include her studies in a school for girls in London and a journey to Switzerland, where she took private lessons in history and classical languages and literature with a professor from the University of Zurich and his wife and travelled the country extensively. These events formed the basis for the story present in the unfinished typescript held at the British Library, usually identified as an autobiographical fragment.³¹ The 1860s were formative for Blind as they have seen the beginning of her longstanding correspondence and friendship with Richard Garnett, about which more is said below, the publication of her first volume of poems in 1867, the only one that appeared under a pseudonym Claud Lake, and the death of her only full brother, Ferdinand, after his failed attempt to assassinate Otto von Bismarck. On 7 May 1866 Ferdinand, who at the time studied in Germany, shot five times at the Prussian prime minister on Unter den Linden, one of the central streets of Berlin.³² On consulting a variety of sources, it is likely that he acted alone with the motivation being that Bismarck

²⁹ Christine Lattek, *Revolutionary Refugees: German Socialism in Britain, 1840-60* (Abington: Routledge, 2006), p. 16.

³⁰ Ana Parejo Vardillo, *Women Poets and Urban Aestheticism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005), p. 52.

³¹ See the section on sources and their trustworthiness for more information on this typescript fragment, p. 45 ff.

³² Otto Pflanze, *Bismarck: Der Reichsgründer* (München: C.H. Beck, 2008), p. 309.

was a traitor to Germany and an unscrupulous politician who advocated violence.³³ Several scholars argue that Mathilde Blind blamed her stepfather for Ferdinand's actions which resulted in a rift between Mathilde and Karl.

The next decade, the 1870s, Blind's reputation in literary society grew steadily, partially due to her engagement with Percy Bysshe Shelley's work and life. During this period Blind also contributed to a variety of periodicals starting with *The Dark Blue*, an aesthetic magazine published in London that lasted for just a couple of years, well as in *New Quarterly Magazine*, *The Examiner*, *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country*, and *The Athenaeum*.³⁴ Marysa Demoor, in *Their Fair Share: Women, Power and criticism in the Athenaeum, from Millicent Garrett Fawcett to Katherine Mansfield* (2000), describes Blind as a meticulous reviewer whose work stands out due to her sense of humour and the 'originality with which she phrases [her observations]' as well as possessing a certain quality of language that 'allows for a description of the "formal or aesthetic qualities" of a poem'.³⁵ Amongst other notable events that happened in Blind's life in the course of this decade, we can name the publication of her edition of Shelley's poems by a prominent German publisher Tauchnitz, and her translation of David Friedrich Strauss's *The Old Faith and the New* (1873).³⁶

³³ See Marcus Mühlwinkel, "Fürst, sind Sie unverletzt?": Attentate im Kaiserreich 1871-1941 (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2014), p. 15.

³⁴ Blind published at least two articles in *The New Quarterly Magazine*; one of which was an essay on Mary Wollstonecraft published in the issues from July 1870, pp. 390-412. The second publication is yet to be identified; however, we know that it was written as it is mentioned in a letter to Blind from Chatto and Windus from 8 April 1879: 'we have much pleasure enclosing you our cheque £17.5.0 for your contribution to the New Quarterly Magazine for July, a copy of which has by this post been forwarded to you' p. 582. (See p. 000 for detailed information on this archive). Consulting the attributions for this particular issue, we observe that there is no article that was identified as written by Blind. However, it is likely that from all of the anonymous pieces she would have authored either one of the book reviews, or the essay *A Poetic Phase in English Modern Art*. It is more difficult to identify which article was written by Blind without any additional clues.

M. Blind, 'Review of Trollop's *Phineas Redux*', *The Examiner*, 21 February 1874, 190.

Blind, 'Maxims and reflections of Goethe', transl. by Blind, *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country*, March 1876, pp. 338-348.

³⁵ Marysa Demoor in *Their Fair Share: Women, Power and criticism in the Athenaeum, from Millicent Garrett Fawcett to Katherine Mansfield* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), pp. 107, 108.

³⁶ See pp. 106-7 for more information on this edition of Shelley.

These journalistic activities were followed by a burst of poetic production during the 1880s. Three volumes appeared during this decade: *The Prophecy of St. Oran and Other Poems* (1881), *The Heather on Fire* (1886), and *The Ascent of Man* (1889). She also published the first ever biography of George Eliot (1883), a novel, *Tarantella* (1885), a biography of Madame Roland and a multi-volume edition of Byron's letters and poems, including an abridged version of *Child Harold* as well as continued to contribute literary reviews to *The Athenaeum*.³⁷ During all this time Blind was also traveling extensively, for example, to Scotland, a variety of places in England, and France, including Paris, Nice and Cimiez, all of which were important for the development of *The Ascent of Man* as the second chapter will demonstrate. What is more, she was a founding member of the Shelley society, presenting a paper in 1886 that compared Shelley's view of nature to Darwin's which anticipates in some respects *The Ascent of Man*'s attempt to fuse their very different approaches to the question of progress.³⁸

The next decade was no less productive. It saw the publication of another two poetical collections, *Dramas in Miniature* (1891) and *Birds of Passage: Songs of the Orient and Occident* (1895) as well as a volume that consisted mostly of previously published poems, *Songs and Sonnets* (1893), and a translation of Marie Bashkirteff's *Journal* (1891). Of particular significance is Blind's stay in Stratford upon Avon with

³⁷ Whereas it is likely that the first of these three volumes was, at least partially, written during the previous decade; however, the same is likely in respect to one of the volumes published in 1890s, *Drama in Miniature* (1891). M. Blind, *Madame Roland* (London: W. H. Allen, 1886).

Amongst the publications in the periodical we can name her review of *The Tale of Tristram and Iseult* in the February's issue of *The National Review* in 1884. As well as eleven reviews published in *The Athenaeum*, including: 'Pygmalion by Thomas Woolner', 24 December 1884, 843; 'The Foray of Queen Meave, and other legends of Ireland's Heroic Age by Aubrey De Vere', 21 October 1882, 525-526.; 'Poetical Works of Frances Ann Kemble', 12 January 1884, 50-51; 'Silenus by Thomas Woolner', 9 August 1884, 165-66; 'Glenaveril; or, Metamorphoses by Earl of Lytton', 29 August 1885, 264-65.

³⁸ It is worth noting that this society was established in 1886.

Mona Caird, which is documented in her commonplace book and inspired the section ‘Shakespeare Sonnets’ from her last collection *Birds of Passage*.

Looking at Blind’s literary career throughout the 1880s and 90s we can say that this was the time when her position within the literary culture of the nineteenth century was cemented. This is evidenced by Blind’s poetry being included in a number of anthologies from the period, such as Hall Caine’s *Sonnets of Three Centuries*.³⁹ According to Jo Gill, anthologies ‘play an important role in canon formation and in the development of audience “taste”’.⁴⁰ Consequently the presence of Blind’s work in authoritative collections, such as Caine’s, Eric S. Robertson’s *English Poetesses* (1883), Elizabeth Sharp’s *Women’s Voices* (1887), Edmund Clarence Stedman’s *A Victorian anthology* (1895) and Alfred H. Miles’s *The Poets and Poetry of the Century* (1907), suggests that her work was accepted by her peers and that her contemporaries perceived Blind’s poetry as representative not only of her gender but also of her generation.

The Ascent of Man, the volume examined in this thesis, consists of the lengthy and ambitious title poem and two other sections: ‘Poems of the Open Air’ and ‘Love in Exile’. ‘The Ascent of Man’ addresses the history of earth and humankind from the creation of the planet to the present day; to facilitate the narrative, the poem is divided into three parts and a prelude. The latter is a Shelleyan invocation to the narrator’s soul to travel upwards to the sky, propelled by elements of the natural world or by ‘the thoughts of the dead’ (‘Wings’, l. 16). In doing so the prelude unites two areas that are of importance for the poem – the natural world and the world of humans. The last stanza speaks of the connection between the past and the present, suggesting that each generation

³⁹ See p. 152 for more information on this collection.

⁴⁰ Jo Gill, *Women’s Poetry*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p. 10.

leans on the discoveries and achievements of the ones before it and thus is metaphorically lifted up by them:

Ascend! take wing on the thoughts of the Dead, my Soul,
 Breathing in colour and stone, flashing through epic and song:
 Thoughts that like avalanche snows gather force as they roll,
 Mighty to fashion and knead the phenomenal throng
 Of generations of men as they thunder along.
('Wings' ll. 16-20)

This stanza demonstrates the poem's intellectual ambition. Human artistic and cultural achievements – the visual artist's 'colour and stone', and the poet's 'epic and song' – have the power to 'knead the phenomenal throng' of individual human lives into a single coherent force. The word 'phenomenal' here gestures towards the Kantian meaning of the term, highlighting the role of the human mind in shaping perception of the external world in a way reminiscent of Shelley's famous opening lines to 'Mont Blanc'. This section also provides a thematic transition to the first part of the poem and its opening, 'Chaunts of Life' – a long section that explores the creation of the earth and human history. It encompasses the animal world prior to the arrival of humans, the organisation of tribal society (including the distribution of roles according to gender) the establishment of early religions, towns and cities and progress towards the social organisation of modern society. The first part of 'The Ascent of Man' concludes with two sonnets: 'A Symbol' and 'Time's Shadow'. The octave of 'A Symbol' reinforces the theme of the passing generations and stresses the fleeting nature of life as demonstrated by the following two lines: '[t]he generations of earth's teeming womb / Rise into being and lapse into tomb' ('A Symbol', ll. 2-3). This emphasis on the transience of individual life is balanced by a recognition of the continuing and growing life of humanity as a whole: 'If man must pass shall Man not still remain?' ('A Symbol', l. 10).

The concluding sonnet of the first part, 'Time's Shadow', continues this theme by again ruminating on the brevity of life:

Thy life, O Man, in this brief moment lies:
 Time's narrow bridge whereon we darkling stand,
 With an infinitude on either hand
 Receding from our eyes.

('Time's Shadow', ll. 1-4)

There are a number of echoes of the Romantic poets in these lines, from Keats's 'darkling' (in the 'Ode to a Nightingale') to Byron's opening lines of the fourth Canto of *Childe Harold*. This is typical of Blind's tendency to use allusion and intertextual reference in her work, sometimes (as here) so ostentatiously as to make it almost a patchwork of citations from various sources.

The present state of the society and connected issues are at the centre of the second part of 'The Ascent of Man', which has a similar make-up to the first: a long poem, 'The Pilgrim Soul', followed by three sonnets at the end 'Saving Love', 'Nirvana' and 'Motherhood'. 'The Leading of Sorrow', which forms the third part of the title poem, continues this focus on the contemporary society, which is presented by Blind in a rather negative light, as well as on the possibility of redemption either through charitable actions or through rediscovering compassion and love.⁴¹ The figure of Love appears throughout the poem. Thus in the beginning of the second canto of 'Chaunts of Life' Blind describes Love as the epitome of creation:

Lo, moving o'er chaotic water,
 Love dawned upon the seething waste,
 Transformed in ever new avatars
 It moved without or pause or haste:

⁴¹ These elements are discussed in more detail throughout the first chapter.

Like sap that mould the leaves of May
It wrought within the ductile clay.

(‘Cahunts of Life’, II, ll. 1-6)

Love here appears to be something like the Holy Spirit, moving over the ‘chaotic water’ of the created world and imparting to it order and the capacity for development. Later on in the poem, however, Love is presented as a little child, similar to the Greek Eros or Roman Cupid. Blind transforms this traditional figure by describing him as a discarded child lying on the ground; his casting-out is the result of negative changes in the society, such as the prevailing obsession with vice, money and false idols. Blind’s enfeeblement of Love reinforces the idea of a dysfunctional society that has abandoned basic human values; what is more, these changes ultimately cause Love to die at the end of ‘The Pilgrim Soul’.

In the beginning of the last poem of ‘The Ascent of Man’, ‘The Leading of Sorrow’, the narrator is seen grieving for Love and expressing a wish to die: ‘Since Love, even Love, is mortal, / Take, unmake, and break me; let me die’ (‘The Leading of Sorrow’, ll. 15-16). This invocation, however, results in Death guiding the narrator through the world, like Virgil guiding Dante in the *Divina Commedia*, and highlighting the Darwinian struggle for survival, and the decline of morals and values present throughout the world.⁴² The poem ends more optimistically with the resurrection of Love.⁴³

As this brief summary indicates, ‘The Ascent of Man’ is an extremely ambitious poem, and as such the culmination of many years of intellectual and poetic activity. It blends philosophical and scientific reflection on the development of life on earth, and of

⁴² See chapter one section 3.

⁴³ See p. 88 and p. 212 for a detailed account of the relevant stanzas.

human life in particular, with allegorical figures and devices derived from the western literary canon, and with a Romantic emphasis on the creative and productive powers of the human mind.

The next part of the volume, 'Poems of the Open Air', is a cycle of twenty-two poems that are roughly arranged around the agricultural year starting with the sowing period 'The Sower' and ending with winter 'A Winter Landscape'. Most of the poems are relatively short with the exception of 'The Sower', the only narrative poem in this section. Although not obviously linked to 'The Ascent of Man', 'Poems of the Open Air' continue its emphasis on the large-scale natural forces that mould and shape human life. It also contains poems with a more personal connection to Blind. 'The Red Sunsets, 1883', 'On the Lighthouse at Antibes', and 'Cagnes' will be looked at in more detail later in the thesis.

Under the title 'Love in Exile' Blind collected twenty songs, as defined by the table of contents, that are united by the theme of lost or unrequited love; all of them are identified only by their first line. In addition to these songs there are four poems: 'Heart's-Ease', 'Untimely Love', 'The After-Glow' and 'L'Envoi' that, according to the table of contents, are slightly separated from the rest of this section. 'Love in Exile' continues the idea, developed in 'The Ascent of Man', of a world in which love has been seriously weakened or even destroyed; Song VIII, for instance, can be seen as inspired by a fragment from *Wuthering Heights*, in particular the passage where Catherine's ghost supposedly knocks on the window. Blind's poem is presented as a ghost's invocation that tries to remind her of undying love: 'Know you not that homeless cry / Is my love's, which cannot die, / Wailing through Eternity?' (VIII, ll. 8-10). Most of the stanzas follow the pattern established in the first one where the first six lines of the stanza speak of the

person that remains and his or her surroundings, while the last four speak of love the narrator felt for the poem's addressee.

The Ascent of Man as a volume is typical of its era in many respects. It deals with a number of topics characteristic of fin-de-siècle poetry, such as the dependence of human life on vast forces beyond the control of individuals; and it also constitutes a kind of 'structured collection', transforming individual lyrics, sonnets and other records of discrete experiences into fragments of a larger picture. It has an ambition and scale beyond most of Blind's other poetic collections, and was perceived by the poet and her readers as the most complete statement of her poetic and personal principles.

Turning to the works that are dealing with Blind's poetry, it is worth noting that most of them were published during the first decade of the twenty-first century and that they address most of Blind's volumes. For example, there are three essays by Diedrick: "My love is a force that will force you to care": Subversive Sexuality in Mathilde Blind's Dramatic Monologues' (2002), 'A Pioneering Female Aesthete: Mathilde Blind in *The Dark Blue*' (2003), and 'The Hectic Beauty of Decay: Positivist Decadence in Mathilde Blind's Late Poetry' (2006), all published before the biography; even if some of the information published in these essays might be replaced by the biography they still represent important steps in the development of research on Blind and her poetry. The first of these three essays is a more general contextualization and description of Blind's work with a particular attention to Blind's early poetry including several poems from *Dramas in Miniature* (1891), such as 'The Russia Student's Tale'. This essay is one of the most extensive works on Blind and her work that presents its reader with a larger overview of the biographical information, themes present in her work and general context and can be seen as a point of origin for Diedrick's biography published several months

ago. His other essays address Blind's early poetry that was published in *The Dark Blue*, in particular, 'The Song of Willi' and, as the title of the last essay suggests, her last volume.

Other notable works on Blind's poetry published around the same time include Susan Brown's 'A still and mute-born vision: Locating Mathilde Blind's Reproductive Poetics' (2003); Robert Fletcher's 'Heir of All the Universe: Evolutionary epistemology in Mathilde Blind's *Birds of Passage: Songs of the Orient and Occident*' (2005) and Charles LaPorte's 'Atheist Prophecy: Mathilde Blind, Constance Naden, and the Victorian Poetess' (2006). From the more recent essays on Blind there are "'Let Your Life on Earth Be Life Indeed': Aestheticism and Secularism in Mathilde Blind's *The Prophecy of St. Oran* and 'On a Torso of Cupid'" by Sarah Lyons or Catherine Birch's essay 'Carrying Her Coyness to a Dangerous Pitch': Mathilde Blind and Darwinian Sexual Selection', which is a slightly modified version of her doctoral thesis that will be explored on pp. 100-102.⁴⁴ Here I have only mentioned essays that, bar one, focus exclusively on Blind. This selection suggests, alongside the works explored in greater detail in the body of the thesis, that there is an interest in Blind's poetry, yet the titles as well as the contents of these works indicate that there is no systematic research into the Blind's poetry such as establishing its intellectual origin, creating reliable editions and paying more attention to the information on its composition and production. At present the only work that provides any kind of systematic knowledge about Blind's life and work is the already mentioned biography by Diedrick.

⁴⁴ Sarah Lyons, "'Let Your Life on Earth Be Life Indeed': Aestheticism and Secularism in Mathilde Blind's *The Prophecy of St. Oran* and 'On a Torso of Cupid'", in *Writing Women of the Fin de Siècle: Authors of Change*, ed. Adrienne E. Gavin, Carolyn W. de la L. Oulton (Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 55-69.

Katy Birch, 'Carrying Her Coyness to a Dangerous Pitch': Mathilde Blind and Darwinian Sexual Selection', *Women: A Cultural Review*, 2013, 24 (1), 71-89.

One aspect of Blind's work that this thesis will bring to the fore is her status as a writer who worked across different literary and cultural traditions. Following her family's move to England, Blind absorbed the culture and language of her adoptive country. It should be noted that in Blind's case we speak more of one culture replacing the other rather than of a hybrid-type relationship between the two cultures, as will be further demonstrated in the body of this thesis. Whereas there are arguments for looking at Blind through the lens of cosmopolitanism based on her travels and the subject-matter of one of her later volumes, the observation made by Diedrick that Blind 'thought of herself and described herself as English' which he supports through a statement by William Sharp is an accurate summary of the situation.⁴⁵ This self-identification is comparable to the one observed by Alison Chapman in Elizabeth Barrett Browning who, 'although conventionally placed in an English literary tradition, proclaimed herself after the move to Florence free from national ties to her country of birth.'⁴⁶ Blind's transition is undeniably different as it took root in her childhood, an element that complicates the discussion by introducing a multitude of agencies that could have affected this process, some of which will be explored in the first chapter of this thesis. Researching the works of an author who went through such a transition allows us to explore the dynamics of late-nineteenth-century literary society from a different perspective.

Of particular interest regarding Blind's cultural transition is her polemical introduction to her biography of George Eliot and her reply to a passage from Eliot's 1854

⁴⁵ For discussion of Blind's cosmopolitanism see Diedrick's biography of Blind and Ulrike Hill's PhD thesis. James Diedrick, *Mathilde Blind*, loc. 305.

⁴⁶ Alison Chapman, *Networking the Nation. British and American Women's Poetry and Italy, 1840-1870* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015), p. xxvi.

essay, 'Woman in France: Madame De Sablé', where Eliot argues for the intellectual superiority of French women over English and German women,

[T]hey alone ... have had a vital influence on the development of literature. For in France alone the mind of woman has passed, like an electric current, through the language, making crisp and definite what is elsewhere heavy and blurred; in France alone, if the writings of women were swept away, a serious gap would be made in the national history.⁴⁷

Eliot suggests that this superiority is down to two reasons; firstly, there is a phrenological difference between these nations — French women have smaller brains than the English or German.⁴⁸ Secondly, the culture of the salon, prevalent in the seventeenth century and since, according to Eliot, in decline, was responsible for women's access to a certain style of conversation: '[men] ... thought to present their best ideas in the guise most acceptable to intelligent and accomplished women'.⁴⁹ Therefore, she concludes, 'women became superior in France by being admitted to a common fund of ideas, to common objects of interest with men'.⁵⁰

Blind, in her discussion of Eliot's essay, stresses the salon's role in the formation of female intellect, describing it as 'the school for women' and, as seen from the first section of this chapter, she was no stranger to such gatherings.⁵¹ One of the advantages of these gatherings was that they represented a merger between the public and private spheres, a fusion that allowed women poets to 'promote and consolidate their individual

⁴⁷ George Eliot, 'Woman in France: Madame De Sablé', *Westminster Review*, October 1854, 448-472 http://webscript.princeton.edu/~geliot/eliot-texts/Eliot_Woman_in_France.html (accessed on 20/01/2013).

Mathilde Blind, *George Eliot* (London: W. H. Allen & Co., 1883), p.1;

Blind's quote slightly differs from the original: 'In France alone woman has had a vital influence...' 451 qtd. from the source above.

⁴⁸ It has to be noted that this part of the argument does not go beyond the brief discussion of the relative sizes of the brain. Blind's account of the essay does not dwell on this particular point; she suggests that it is for 'the scientist of the future to decide' whether this theory is valid or not (Blind, *George Eliot*, p. 3). Considering that Blind was interested in scientific theories, her attitude can be interpreted as muted disagreement with Eliot's views.

⁴⁹ Eliot, 'Woman in France'.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Blind, *George Eliot*, p. 3, p. 2.

careers, establish contacts with publishers, editors of magazines and newspapers, and express and discuss their ideas on poetry, poetics and politics'.⁵² Bearing this in mind, it is likely that Blind was building this part of her argument on experiences that were formative for her development and for the germination of the ideas that later evolved, at the very least, into 'AoM'.⁵³

Eliot's argument on the superiority of French women writers dictates the development of Blind's line of reasoning in the rest of the chapter; thus, she asks, 'shall we be forced to admit that the representative women of England cannot justly be placed on as high a level?'.⁵⁴ She answers this question by, firstly, listing several prominent women of letters whose achievements were comparable with those of the Frenchwomen mentioned in Eliot's essay.⁵⁵ Blind's list includes, for example, Queen Elizabeth, Fanny Burney and Jane Austen as well as several contemporary authors: the Brontës, whose works contain 'the very heartbeats of womanhood in those powerful utterances that seem to spring from some central emotional energy' and Elizabeth Barrett Browning who, in Blind's opinion, occupied 'a unique place among poets'.⁵⁶

Another point present in Blind's polemical introduction is that, in refuting Eliot's argument of the superiority of French women she does not mention, even in passing, any of the outstanding German women of letters such as Bettina von Arnim, Clara Schumann or Karoline von Günderode, out of whom at least von Arnim would have been familiar

⁵² Ana Parejo Vadillo, 'New Woman Poets and the Culture of the salon at the fin de siècle', *Women: A Cultural Review*, 10.1 (1999), 22-34, 24.

⁵³ See section on Mazzini for an example of how a salon-type environment affected her education.

⁵⁴ Blind, *George Eliot*, p. 4.

⁵⁵ As an example of outstanding women of letters Eliot mentions Madame de Sévigné, Madame Dacier, Madame de Staël, Madame Roland and George Sand.

⁵⁶ Blind, *George Eliot*, pp. 4-5.

to Blind's potential readers.⁵⁷ Considering Blind's German origin, this omission is likely to be significant. It is no doubt connected to the volume's target audience and the cultural origin of its subject; it was more prudent for Blind to refute Eliot's argument by contrasting her with a French author, demonstrating that a British woman author is by no means inferior to a French one. It was also, however, connected with Blind's attempt to distance herself from her German-Jewish origins and, perhaps, from the main part of the circle in which she was brought up.⁵⁸ Furthermore, the choice of Sand rather than (or together with) a German author as a figure with whom to contrast Eliot with could have been connected to Sand being one of the novelists whose works had influenced Blind.⁵⁹ Blind saw herself as belonging to British literary tradition and wanted to make sure that her readers saw her primarily in this context.

Blind's 'otherness' has been noted by a number of recent critics such as Judith Wilson, who describes her as someone who is 'a little apart from English culture'.⁶⁰ She continues by observing that even if Blind had 'significant presence in artistic and intellectual circles' and is an 'important biographer of George Eliot [and] a translator of substance', she was an outsider through her 'radical politics and aesthetics' and 'foreignness'.⁶¹ Indeed, at the first glance Blind's life story suggests that she would inevitably become an outsider: her origins (German-Jewish immigrant), upbringing and education (connections with political radicals) as well as her gender all placed her at one

⁵⁷ The most notable author on the list that would have been familiar to British public is Arnim, Bettina von (1785 - 1859) and her work *Goethe's Correspondence with a Child* (1835).

⁵⁸ It is very likely that in her later years Blind also wanted to distance herself from the German circle in London, since there are no overt mentions of it in the available archival materials. Also, for more on Blind's distance from German literature see memoir of Kate Kroecker (née Freiligrath) on Blind.

⁵⁹ See the introduction to the first chapter.

⁶⁰ Judith Wilson, *Out of My Borrowed Books. Poems by Augusta Webster, Mathilde Blind and Amy Levy* (Manchester: Fyfield Books Carcanet, 2006), p. 105.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

remove from the dominant culture.⁶² Speaking about Emily Pfeiffer, one of Blind's contemporaries who was of Welsh and German heritage, Kathleen Hickok observes that her background was a possible drawback in London's literary circles, and the same could certainly be said for Blind.⁶³ However, as this thesis will demonstrate, even if Blind's contemporaries were aware of her origins her non-Englishness did not materially affect her reputation till after her death. For example, an article on *The Ascent of Man* published in the *Young Folks Paper* in 1889 describes Blind as 'English, but of German origin', whereas Watts-Dunton's obituary presents her in much harsher tones: 'Miss Blind was handicapped by weights from which English-born writers are free when writing in their mother tongue.'⁶⁴

A hallmark of this change was that some of the articles written shortly after her death argued not only that her poetry was not good enough, but that Blind should not have been writing poetry at all. For example, a review of *A Selection from the Poems of Mathilde Blind* contains the following comment: 'she **chose** to be regarded as a **poetess**, and published one volume after another, encouraged by praise of **undiscerning** friends' [emphasis mine].⁶⁵ The condescending tone used by this reviewer as well as the implication that she 'chose to be regarded' as such deny Blind even the status of a minor poet.⁶⁶ What is more it contains a not very veiled slight to the people who championed

⁶² Vadillo argues that the neighbourhood where the Blinds were settled in England, St John's Wood, 'politically ... was a highly controversial space'. Anna Parejo Vadillo, *Women Poets and Urban Aestheticism: Passengers of Modernity* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 124.

⁶³ Kathleen Hickok, 'Why is this woman Still Missing? Emily Pfeiffer', in *Women's Poetry, Late Romantic to Late Victorian: Gender and Genre, 1830-1900*, ed. Isobel Armstrong and Virginia Blain (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1999), pp. 373-389, p. 387.

⁶⁴ Anon., 'Two New Poets', *Young Folks Paper*, 13 April 1889, 238.

Theodore Watts-Dunton, 'Miss Blind', *The Athenaeum*, 5 December 1896, 796-7, 796.

⁶⁵ 'Mathilde Blind, *A Selection from the Poems of Mathilde Blind*. Edited by Arthur Symons (Fisher Unwin)', *The Academy*, 25 December 1897, 567.

⁶⁶ See Chapter 3 for a further discussion of Blind's perception by the critics, and chapter 2 section 2 for more information on Blind's friends and their roles in promoting her work.

Blind's poetry including Richard Garnett, Ford Madox Brown, William Michael Rossetti and Arthur Symons, whom we by no means can describe as 'undiscerning'.⁶⁷

What is more, *The Academy* presents Blind's intellectual capability in a negative light; the reviewer argues that her 'intelligence was not strong enough to consume, to fuse its scientific material into the glowing vapour of imaginative truth.'⁶⁸ Based on the review itself we cannot unequivocally determine whether the writer questions Blind's abilities on the ground of lack of education in certain areas, her gender and related assumptions, or because her understanding of Darwin's theories and their expression in the poem are not satisfactory.⁶⁹ Reviews, such as the one above, seemingly changed the opinion on Blind and her work and contributed to her being nearly forgotten. Yet, as this thesis will show, Blind's work, including *The Ascent of Man*, was not treated this harshly during her lifetime. Considering Blind's origin, it is possible that the change in the reception of her poetry was affected by it and by the general anti-German mood around the end of the nineteenth century, which, as Lynne Walhout Hinojosa points out, started in the 1880s.⁷⁰ In this regard the perception of Blind's otherness can be split into two parts: the one present during her lifetime which Blind attempted to negate by attempting to assimilate as much as possible and the otherness that emerged after Blind's passing, where her accent and origins were highlighted by the critics of her poetry.

The same can be said in relation to the literary heritage of Mathilde Blind; throughout most of the twentieth century her poems, even if they possess cultural value, were forgotten and their recovery during the past decades has led to several studies that

⁶⁷ See p. 133-8 for discussion of Blind's friendships and their effect on her works.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 567.

⁶⁹ For more on the reception of the volume and some other opinions on Blind's interpretation of Darwinism see chapter 1 section 3.

⁷⁰ Lynne Walhout Hinojosa 'Shakespeare and (anti-German) Nationalism in the Writing of English Literary History, 1880-1923', *English Literature in Transition (1880-1920)*, 46:3 (2003), 227-249. See pp. 227-9, where Hinojosa is addressing the deterioration of the English-German relationship.

focus on Blind's engagement with Charles Darwin's theories. However, there is little background knowledge on the key volume that addresses this theme, *The Ascent of Man*. This volume stands out for several reasons, especially the ambitious title poem, which represents an interpretation of evolutionary theories as well as an attempt to trace the development of humankind. Blind explores these themes not only in the long poem that gave the volume its name, but also on a smaller scale; the same issues are present in the shorter lyrics in the second part of the volume, 'Poems of the Open Air'. Several poems from this section explore the state of humanity by, for example, focusing on a story set in a village, not unlike one of George Eliot's novels. Another element that makes this volume worth studying is the counterbalance of the more complex and eye-catching themes in the first part of the volume with the more sentimental love poetry that the third part, 'Love in Exile', is devoted to. All this points towards the versatility of Blind's writing and intellectual interests, which suggests that a more detailed exploration of this volume will allow us to gain a deeper insight into Blind's literary connections and her intellectual background. By creating a detailed investigation of *The Ascent of Man*'s life we approach a volume by a non-canonical poet with the same attention that is usually paid to the male poets who constitute the overwhelming majority of canonical authors.

A further reason for a detailed investigation of this volume is that there are no published sources of information that examine the background of this volume or provide a full and reliable text to follow.⁷¹ The best available version of the text can be found online in the *Victorian Women Writers Project* which also contains what appears to be computer-transcribed versions of all of Blind's poetry apart from the two collected

⁷¹ Due to the rarity of the original publications it is difficult to obtain a reliable copy that can be worked with. See p. 182-3 for the print run of the first editions.

editions. However, at least in the case of *The Ascent of Man*, the text presented contains several mistakes, which can affect the interpretation of the poems. For example, ‘lush cherries’ in the original line from ‘The Teamster’ ‘Lush cherries dangled 'gainst the latticed panes’ (l. 44) turned into ‘lust cherries’ altering the meaning of the line. The modern reprints are of an even worse quality with incorrect lineation, pagination and typographical errors. Some of these are obvious copies from the *Victorian Women Writers Project* as they have the same mistakes and also incorporate page breaks, preserved in the former to illustrate the pagination of the original volume. In addition to this some of the modern versions try to fit far more lines on the page than the first and only edition of the volume. For example, looking at the Dodo Press reprint of *The Ascent of Man* (2009) we see several issues with the text. Firstly, this text preserved the lush/lust cherries mistake, which suggest that the text was “borrowed” from the aforementioned website. Second, there are split stanzas in the Dodo Press text, which, as can be seen from the table below, provide an additional argument for the text being copied from the online source. As demonstrated by the leftmost image the stanza is separated in two by a page break, which was kept in the Dodo press reprint of the volume.

‘The Ascent of Man’ ‘Chaunts of Life’ Canto II, ll. 49-54		
1889	<i>Victorian Women Writers Project</i>	Dodo Press reprint
<p>Or two swart bulls of self-same age Meet furiously with thunderous roar, And lash together, blind with rage, And clanging horns that fain would gore</p> <p>THE ASCENT OF MAN. Their rival, and so win the prize Of those impassive female eyes.</p>	<p>Or two swart bulls of self-same age Meet furiously with thunderous roar, And lash together, blind with rage, And clanging horns that fain would gore</p> <p>THEIR rival, and so win the prize Of those impassive female eyes.</p> <p>PAGE: 12</p>	<p>Or two swart bulls of self-same age Meet furiously with thunderous roar, And lash together, blind with rage, And clanging horns that fain would gore</p> <p>Their rival, and so win the prize Of those impassive female eyes.</p>

As can be seen from the examples, the break between pages eleven and twelve is preserved in all publications. It is explainable in the *Victorian Women Writers Project* as it allows the readers of the volume to see how the poetry was laid out in the physical copy of the volume, its existence in the Dodo Press reprint is unsubstantiated. This cavalier approach to the text highlights the need for a thorough and scholarly investigation of its origin.

Another feature of the existing literature on *The Ascent of Man* is that it mainly consists of critical readings of the title poem with almost no attention to the volume's intellectual or physical origins. As the result, some of the existing readings appear inaccurate once *The Ascent of Man*'s history is uncovered. To give an example of such a reading we can turn to one of the common issues that haunts a good deal of research into women authors: the 'conflati[on] [of] the woman poet's body with her literary corpus'.⁷² Blind's work and her life are, for instance, aligned by Diedrick, who argues that her poetry provides evidence of her erotic interest in Richard Garnett.⁷³ Diedrick suggests that the proof for this is present in 'The Song of Willi' published in *The Dark Blue* in 1871, which 'tells of women yearning for the touch of lovers who have died before their love could be consummated,' and in 'I lately wrote' from *The Prophecy of Saint Oran* (1872), where 'the first two stanzas urge lovers to seize the day' as these poems 'boldly assert the right of women to have and express sexual desire outside of marriage'.⁷⁴ The same passage also suggests that Blind's position on relationships was affected by Shelley and by her

⁷² Susan Brown, 'The Victorian Poetess', in *Cambridge Companion to Victorian Poetry*, ed. Joseph Bristow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 180-202, p. 181.

⁷³ For more information on Garnett see p. 160 ff.

⁷⁴ Diedrick, *Blind*, loc. 1462.

mother, whose relationship with Karl Blind started while she was still married to Mathilde's father.

As O'Brien observes in relation to Letitia Elizabeth Landon: '[t]he production of feeling in women's poetry became conflated with ideas of producing a feminine self which was identical with the poet behind the words.'⁷⁵ There are, of course, examples when work on Victorian women poets has aimed to challenge this idea. One of these is provided by Angela Leighton, who aims to separate the lives and work of the poets she is writing about: 'the self who lives is not the same as the self who writes.'⁷⁶ She demonstrates the necessity of such an approach by speaking of Christina Rossetti and Charlotte Mew: 'in Rossetti and Mew, the split between the self displayed in public and the self who wrote poems almost makes nonsense of any biographical explanation of the works.'⁷⁷

For an example pertinent to the subject matter of this thesis we can turn to Angela Thirlwell's discussion of *The Ascent of Man*'s third part 'Love in Exile'. Thirlwell connects the stories of unrequited or lost love that these poems address to Blind's relationship with Ford Madox Brown: 'Blind wrote a sequence of poems called *Love in Exile* which mapped the journey of a love affair, alluding to her internal exile of forbidden love', where Blind describes herself as 'the lost somnambulist of love' and Brown is the addressee of the poems.⁷⁸ Thirlwell supports this argument by reading Blind's friendship with Brown and Blind's several prolonged stays with the Browns as a romantic relationship. The lack of information on Blind's publication leads to Thirlwell not being

⁷⁵ O'Brien, p. 16.

⁷⁶ Leighton, p. 4.

This distinction can already be seen in Marie Bashkirtseff's diary. Thus on 30 May 1877 she writes: 'the woman who is writing, and her whom I describe, are really two persons' (p. 260). Marie Bashkirtseff, *The Journal of Marie Bashkirtseff* transl. Mathilde Blind (London, Paris, Melbourne: Cassell & Company, Ltd., 1890).

⁷⁷ Leighton, p. 5.

⁷⁸ Angela Thirlwell, *Into the Frame. The Four Loves of Ford Madox Brown*, (Chato & Windus: London, 2010), p. 202.

aware of the two different versions of ‘Love in Exile’: one published in *The Ascent of Man* (1889) and another, slightly modified, in *Songs and Sonnets* (1893), and of their differences. What is more, the sonnets used by Thirlwell are published only in the later of these two versions.⁷⁹ This difference is important as it brings in a possibility that these poems might be addressed to someone else or to no-one at all. For example, based on a letter by Arthur Symons we can present an argument for him being a potential addressee for the feelings expressed in these poems. In a letter to Katherine Willard on 21 December 1891, Symons writes about Blind’s volume *Dramas in Miniature*, published just two years after *The Ascent of Man* and two years before *Songs and Sonnets*:

[A] book which may interest you for other than its epic quality when I tell you that the later poems, from ‘Scherzo’ onwards some twenty pages, are written about my humble self. ... I would tell no one but you, for I confess it seems to me rather ridiculous to be sentimentalised over by a middle-aged woman, whom I appreciate as a friend, whom I admire as a writer, but whose demonstrations of affection are a little uncomfortable to me.⁸⁰

This passage suggests that there might be a distant possibility that some of the lyrics from ‘Love in Exile’ speak of Symons as love interest; however, there is no record that would allow us to make a definite connection even if it is known that both poets met before 1889. More importantly, making such conjectures between a poet’s life and her work without a clear indication in the poet’s notes about such connection devalues the poet and her work.

Examples like the one above refer to a long standing critical tradition which reads women’s poetry as autobiographical in nature. It should be noted that there is evidence

⁷⁹ *Songs and Sonnets* represents a type of selected edition with most of the poems included in the volume being printed Blind’s earlier collections. The poems that Thirlwell includes are numbered II and VII in the second version of the sequence.

⁸⁰ Arthur Symons, *Arthur Symons: Selected Letters, 1880–1935*, ed. Karl Beckson, John M. Munro (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), p. 91.

that Blind's contemporaries were fully aware of the danger of conflating the lyric 'I' with the author, as Richard Cronin observes: 'Victorian poets often record an awareness that in the act of composition they experience a sense of being divided from themselves. The narrative 'I' is for them a compound rather than a simple subject.'⁸¹ To demonstrate this he turns to Augusta Webster, who in 'Poets and Personal Pronouns' (1878) writes that 'as a rule, I does not mean I.'⁸² Thus, applying the attitude to Blind's works, such as the poems forming 'Love in Exile', reinforces the suggestions made above. The awareness of this difference is an important part of recovery yet, as Terence A. Hoagwood and Kathryn Ledbetter observe,

[A] common assumption, widespread even among feminist critics, [that] sometimes leads to a neglect of that literary experience: the notion that the feelings described in a poem can be attributed to its writer ... is still widespread, often without interpretative anxiety concerning sincerity, mechanisms of exchange, or other realities of the author's life or the history of the book.⁸³

At the same time, a complete omission of the biographical details in discussion of the poet's work can also have negative effects on our understanding of her intellectual origins, position in the literary society of the time and legacy. As Leighton observes, 'to ignore the authorial name, and all the historical and biographical information that goes with it, would be to lose, not only an already lost history of women's writing, but also the rationale for writing about women poets at all.'⁸⁴ Even if this refers to the earlier stages of Victorian women poets' recovery, it is applicable to authors like Blind, whose work is still being uncovered, as not knowing the extended context around the creation of the works, as this thesis will demonstrate, can repeat and reinforce the existing

⁸¹ Richard Cronin, *Reading Victorian Poetry* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), p. 28.

⁸² Augusta Webster, 'Poets and Personal Pronouns', qtd. in Cronin, p. 28

⁸³ Terence A Hoagwood and Kathryn Ledbetter, *'Colour'd Shadows': Contexts in Publishing, Printing, and Reading Nineteenth-Century British Women Writers* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 4.

⁸⁴ Leighton, p. 4.

misapprehensions. Therefore, there is a need for a detailed and careful exploration of their lives that identifies the key elements of their intellectual and professional development.

An example of why we need to be aware of life elements is Paula Alexandra Guminarães' essay that looks at how 'Feminine *Naturphilosophie*' is employed in Blind's and Emily Brontë's poetry from the standpoint of feminist ecocriticism.⁸⁵ Her key argument is that 'poets such as Emily Brontë and Mathilde Blind – themselves professing a sort of nature religion – have not only questioned the notion of Creation as a male myth but also challenged the prevailing anthropocentric view of life on Earth'.⁸⁶ Some of the information on Blind's life that Guminarães uses to build her argument, however, could produce a misleading impression of Blind's life and work. For example, Guminarães states that Blind took 'courses in Middle German, Gothic and Latin at the University of Zurich'.⁸⁷ This is partially true; according to the fragment identified by Richard Garnett as Blind's autobiography Blind did indeed go to Switzerland and took lessons in these subjects. However, she was not enrolled at the University of Zurich but had private lessons with a professor from that university and his wife. Even if these misinterpretations do not alter "the big picture" of Blind's life and work, they potentially affect more detailed readings of her poetry. Thus, the latter example allows a person, who is not aware of the details of *The Ascent of Man*'s composition timeline, to surmise that at least the title poem of this volume was written between 1886 and 1889.

⁸⁵ Paula Alexandra Guminarães, "'Over my boundless waste of soul': Echoes of the Natural World, or a feminine *Naturphilosophie*, in the Poetry of Emily Brontë and Mathilde Blind'. *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies* 7.2 (2011), www.ncgsjournal.com/issue72/guminares.htm. (Accessed on 28/07/2011)

The article has some factual inaccuracies when describing Blind's life. Thus, Guminarães states that Blind's lecture on nature in Darwin and Shelley from 1886 foreshadowed Blind's interest in Darwin's evolutionary theories. (<19>) However, Blind's interest in this subject originated far earlier. It is also worth noting that 'Love in Exile' is presented by Guminarães as an independent volume published in 1893 and not a part of *The Ascent of Man* or *Songs and Sonnets*.

⁸⁶ Ibid., <1>.

⁸⁷ Ibid., <17>.

One last example concerns the order of composition of *The Ascent of Man* and Blind's lecture: 'Shelley's View of Nature Contrasted with Darwin's'.⁸⁸ Two existing works, a PhD thesis by Adam Coccaro and Diedrick's biography, presume that the ideas expressed in the lecture informed the material presented in *The Ascent of Man*.⁸⁹ However, as the second chapter of the thesis will demonstrate, Blind started working on 'The Ascent of Man' several years prior to the lecture. Even if Diedrick does not use this as the starting point for further discussion of either the volume or the title poem, the presence of such a mistake should be noted as it is likely that Diedrick's biography will be used as an authoritative work on Blind and thus might have a detrimental effect on future works on the poem.

A further issue that affects the recovery of *The Ascent of Man* and Blind's other poetry is the posthumous treatment of her poems by her literary executor Arthur Symons. The two volumes edited by him, *A Selection from the Poems of Mathilde Blind* (1897) and *Poetical Works of Mathilde Blind* (1900), alter the original order of the poems, affecting the reader's perception of her work. Thus, it would be incorrect to define the last posthumous edition of her work, *Poetical Works of Mathilde Blind* (1900) as the definitive edition of her work; in order to understand Blind's intentions, we need to look at the original editions of her texts. Exploring the structures of these parts and comparing it to other multi-poem volumes, bar *Song and Sonnets*, we observe that the poems forming these collections are arranged to form a narrative.⁹⁰ For example, in 'Poems of the Open Air' the texts are arranged according to the seasons and agricultural cycle. Hence a

⁸⁸ Mathilde Blind, *Shelley's View of Nature Contrasted with Darwin's* (London: Printed by Richard Clay & Sons for private distribution, 1886).

⁸⁹ See pp. 93-4 for discussion of Coccaro's work and the relevant details. Diedrick, *Blind*, loc. 4732.

⁹⁰ *Songs and Sonnets* (1893) is not included in the list because it mostly consists of the previously published poems and, even if their order was changed, it is likely that the volume represents a collection of Blind's shorter works.

disruption of this order affects our comprehension of the author's intentions. Both Symons' editions present the poems in a different order. This is perhaps excusable in the case of the *Selected Poems*; it is, however, the collected edition that does the most damage in this case. The contents of 'Poems of the Open Air' in the latter volume demonstrate that Symons added several poems to the section that previously were published in other volumes such as 'The Street-Children's Dance' from *The Prophecy of Saint Oran and Other Poems* (1881) and two poems from *Birds of Passage: Songs of the Orient and Occident* (1895): 'Roman Anemones' and 'Ave Maria in Rome'.

These alterations came to stand, as Symons notes in the preface to the collected edition, because he combined 'all those [poems] in other volumes which come under the same title'.⁹¹ However, on consulting these books it becomes evident that the 'Poems of the Open Air' section is present only in *The Ascent of Man*. He not only added the poems to the original line-up but ended up moving the original pieces around. For example, 'Reapers', which is the tenth poem in the 1889 edition and is thematically connected to autumn, harvest and nature preparing for the end of the year, now follows 'The Sower', which in both versions is the first poem of the cycle and thematically belongs to the early spring and awakening of nature. Furthermore, the longest poem of the cycle, 'The Teamster', was removed and placed in the 'Dramas in Miniature' sequence. Thematically, 'The Teamster' is suited to be a part of the latter yet, as Symons acknowledges, there was no information in Blind's papers which would suggest that she intended to change the order of the poems even though her will allows her friends open access to her intellectual heritage. This suggests that Symons either did not observe the

⁹¹ Arthur Symons, 'Preface' in Mathilde Blind, *Poetical Works of Mathilde Blind*, Arthur Symons (ed.) (T. Fisher Unwin: London, 1900), pp. vii-ix, p. viii.

connection between the poems in the original section or that he thought that his vision of the order was superior to Blind's. Symons's treatment of Blind's poetry was noted by Judith Wilson, who states that 'the result [of Symons's alterations] dismembers her [Blind's] work: in place of poetic development and the narrative expansiveness that Blind can command, Symons created a memorial'; however, Wilson does not go into a deeper discussion of the issue and what it implies for the destiny of *The Ascent of Man*.⁹² Another brief comment on Symons harming Blind's posthumous reputation is present in Diedrick's first essay on Blind that observes that Symons's exclusion of 'her dramatic monologues from *A Selection From the Poems of Mathilde Blind* ... made it easier to misrepresent Blind in his introduction' to this collection.⁹³ What is more, judging by the critical response to both of Symons's editions, it is likely that his treatment of Blind distorted her contribution to the literary heritage of the nineteenth century. Therefore, to recover and preserve Blind's work we need to turn to the volumes published during her lifetime and disregard Symons' editions as an obstacle to the recovery.

Symons's treatment of Blind's poetry is symptomatic of the lengthy critical history of misrepresentation of female writers by male critics. As the example above demonstrated, such attitudes significantly affect the poet's posthumous reception as well as constitute what can be seen as rewriting of the work especially as the poems' rearrangement destroyed the internal logic of Blind's work. A combination of such attitudes with the still present issue of conflating a women author's work and life results in misinterpretations and misunderstanding in the literary heritage left by such authors.

⁹² Judith Wilson, 'Mathilde Blind', in *Out of my Borrowed Books. Poems by Augusta Webster, Mathilde Blind and Amy Levy*, ed. Judith Wilson (Flyfield Books: Manchester, 2006), pp. 101-6, p. 101.

⁹³ Diedrick, 'Subversive Sexuality', 360.

These issues demonstrate the need for detailed and comprehensive studies of lesser-known writers such as Blind.

All of the above presents us with the case for Blind's work being in need of recovery as well as it has to be treated with more attention than it currently is. What is more, the textual issues as well as Symons's reshuffle of Blind's poems demonstrate a necessity for a quality contemporary edition of Blind's poetry. However, as there are considerable gaps in the existing knowledge on Blind and all of her work at this point in time a more comprehensive study of one of her volumes is more appropriate. Indeed, an edition of poetry limits the amount of contextual information on the author and the volume itself that can be included in the notes to the text. Thus, in the case of an under-researched poet, such as Blind, a more comprehensive study is a necessary first step before a production of a definitive scholarly edition of her work. The decision to create first a descriptive study of the volume rather than begin with a scholarly edition of *The Ascent of Man* was influenced by the following argument of Marion Thain and Ana Parejo Vadillo. In 'Editing Michael Field: Taking *Fin-de-Siècle* Women's Poetry to a Broader Audience' they note that editing women poets comes with a set of specific issues:

[C]hief amongst these is a need to ensure that any modern edition situates that work within a web of connection that demonstrates its significance to an informed understanding of the period, not just to an understanding of a community of women writers. ... Too often, the price paid for renewed attention to women writers is the holding of their work separate from a mainstream of cultural and literary history.⁹⁴

These observations support the aforementioned statement about the need to situate an edition of women's poetry within a larger context, and the lack of factual information on

⁹⁴ Marion Thain, Ana Parejo Vadillo, 'Editing Michael Field: Taking *Fin-de-Siècle* Women's Poetry to a Broader Audience', in *Writing Women of the Fin de Siècle*, pp. 70-82. p. 71.

The Ascent of Man makes it difficult to include the necessary amount of background data in a more succinct form, that is usually required of an edition.

The last question that needs to be answered here is connected to the choice of the volume, that is why *The Ascent of Man* deserves more attention than any of Blind's other volumes? First of all, one of the points of interest in exploring this volume is the connection to Darwin's theories, which makes *The Ascent of Man* stand out from Blind's other volumes. Secondly, this volume represents a new beginning for Blind in terms of the start of her long-term cooperation with Chatto & Windus as well as representing the middle of her poetic career. What is more, as this thesis will demonstrate, the poems included in the volume present an interesting amalgamation of ideas that sometimes can be perceived as being total opposites of each other, such as evolution and Christianity. In this connection Blind's own records of ideas and people who affected her provide a unique and valuable perspective, with such data not being as available for Blind's other volumes.

Sources and their Trustworthiness

An important component of recovery research is connected with the trustworthiness of the accessible archival materials. One of the challenges of working on under-researched authors, whose reputation declined with the advent of the twentieth century, is that their disappearance affected the preservation of the contextual material pertaining to their work such as correspondence, diaries and other records. Florence S. Boos observes in the 'Introduction' to *Working-Class Women Poets in Victorian Britain: An Anthology*: 'One cannot recuperate what no longer exists. The intimate contexts that gave these writings life have vanished, and most of the documents that might clarify the

lives and publication histories of working-class poets are irrevocably lost.’⁹⁵ These problems are relevant not only to research into working-class women poets, but also to recovery studies in general. As demonstrated earlier, the information provided by the posthumous publications of Blind's work has to be treated with caution.⁹⁶ The same applies to the sources used to establish the biography of *The Ascent of Man*. As this thesis relies heavily on archival research to develop a better understanding of this volume, it is pertinent to include an overview of archival sources consulted and connected problems in this introduction.⁹⁷

By far the largest amount of material pertaining to Blind's life and work is held at the British Library, and it is predominantly of an epistolary nature. The majority of this collection consists of correspondence between Blind and Richard Garnett (Ms Add 61927-9), which spans over twenty years and, although fragmentary, provides a valuable insight into Blind's life and work.⁹⁸ Even considering the size of this collection, there are still considerable gaps, which, if filled, might alter our perception of Blind and her work. These letters will be discussed at length in the first part of the thesis which, amongst other things, speaks about Richard Garnett's involvement in Blind's work and his effect on *The Ascent of Man*. Amongst other elements of the British Library collection, there are letters that are not directly addressed to Blind or written by her, such as the ones from Ludwig Mond to Alfred Russel Wallace or from Arthur Symonds to Michael Field, which also provide valuable contextual information about *The Ascent of Man*.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Boos, 'Introduction', p. 4.

⁹⁶ The 1899 reprint of *The Ascent of Man* does not sufficiently alter our perception of Blind's work as the only difference is the addition of introduction by Alfred Russel Wallace.

⁹⁷ Some of the factual information that will be used to track the history of *AoM* is not exclusively connected to the volume and is gathered piece by piece from the data on Blind's other volumes and even, where her approach to composition will be discussed, from some unpublished poems, who date later than 1889. Furthermore, several sources will be looked at length in the body of the thesis.

⁹⁸ See chapter 2 section 2 for the detailed overview of the letters.

⁹⁹ See p. 127, n. 181 and pp. 192-3 for Mond's letter and pp. 150-1 for Symonds's.

In addition to the letters, the British Library's Blind collection contains a fragment of a manuscript, which is identified by Richard Garnett as a part of Blind's autobiography. It consists of several typed fragments and the pencilled marks, which refer to foolscap pages, insert a missing word, or rephrase or amend spellings, suggest that these sheets are not the first iteration of the text; these corrections, however, do not allow us to be exact about the stage of composition. These fragments tell the life-story of a young woman starting with her enrolling at a new school in England after several years of being an autodidact with the rest of the narrative following the protagonist's school life and her adventures in Switzerland sometime after expulsion from the school for atheism. This element, according to Diedrick's biography of Blind, can be seen as based on Blind's life, but it is difficult not to wonder whether its presence and the manner in which it is described was modelled on Blind's poetical hero, Percy Bysshe Shelley, being sent down from Oxford. If one is to believe, as Diedrick does, that these extracts represent Blind's early life with reasonable accuracy, their potential value lies in providing information on her intellectual background. For example, the first part of the text mentions that the protagonist read Carlyle's *On Heroes and Hero Worship* and *Sartor Resartus* and Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, and the second one contains a list of German medieval poetry, such as *Der Arme Heinrich*, as well as several titles from the classics — Caesar's *Gaul* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. However, the autobiographical nature of the text is almost unanimously unchallenged; possibly, because it was first noted in Garnett's 'Memoir' of Blind, the truthfulness of which is rarely challenged. Garnett writes that 'late in life, Mathilde Blind began an autobiography, of which, unfortunately, little remains'.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ Garnett, 'Memoir', p. 3.

Also, it needs to be mentioned that text is not dated and there are no hints in Garnett's 'Memoir' or in their correspondence as to when the text was written thus making it even more complicated to estimate the autobiographical connection,

Looking at his description of the autobiography one can be certain that he is speaking about the same fragments that are held at the British Library. For instance, Garnett's account of the opening of the text: 'it would seem to have been intended to commence with her earliest recollections; but, if these were ever committed to paper, the manuscript is lost or has perished', corresponds to the impression one gets on reading the typescript.¹⁰¹

In determining the accuracy of Garnett's presumption of the text being an autobiography one has to take into account its fragmentary character and the uncertainty about its true nature. The latter has been noted by Garnett himself: 'it is not easy to determine its contemplated extent or its precise purpose. To judge by what remains, it was not intended as a complete history of her life'.¹⁰² Such uncertainty makes one wonder why the question of whether or not these fragments really are Blind's autobiography has never been asked before, especially as one of Blind's closest friends did not fully know the provenance of these fragments. As they could cast light on the origins of *The Ascent of Man*, it has to be established whether one is dealing with a fragment of a novel with autobiographical elements or a true autobiography.

Returning to Garnett's 'Memoir', we observe that it does not provide any information that would help to choose between the versions above; for example, he mentions that some of the names used in Blind's text are real.¹⁰³ Considering that there are just separate incomplete pieces of the text and the final authorial intention is unknown it is not possible to unequivocally determine the degree to which the published version of the text was supposed to reflect Blind's biography. This is also supported by Garnett's

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 3.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 3.

¹⁰³ See ibid., p. 3.

observation that *Blind* does not include information on ‘family circumstances’ and the only part that is included is focused on ‘such incidents only as she felt to be significant for her moral and intellectual development’.¹⁰⁴ Thus it is likely that the protagonist is a mask to represent her experiences, making the fragments more of a fictional narrative with biographical elements. This interpretation is also supported by the fragments themselves, with the name of *Blind*’s protagonist being different to her own. In the extracts held at the British Library the protagonist’s name is present only in one place; it is the scene where she is meeting with the headmistress and a priest shortly before being expelled from the school. There the headmistress addresses the girl as Alma: ‘Alma, Alma! this is God’s judgment upon me for loving you far above my other pupils. Till today I implicitly trusted you, now I find I have been cruelly deceived’.¹⁰⁵

Even if the text has biographical underpinnings, *Blind*’s choice to create a distance between herself and the protagonist by using a different name is most likely connected to *Blind* wanting to keep Mathilde-the-person private and hidden with the public focus being on the shaping Mathilde-the-poet. There are two aspects that need to be mentioned in this connection. Firstly, as noted by Peterson, ‘autobiographies of women artists and authors necessarily required discussion of professional achievement and career, something that early nineteenth-century women poets preferred to avoid.’¹⁰⁶ Thus, such a strategy could have been used to escape the potential amalgamation of *Blind*’s work and life where *Blind* took a leaf from Bashkirtseff’s book separating the woman

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

As it will be seen in the first chapter, *Blind*’s relationship with at least a part of her family was strained thus making the omission not entirely surprising, if the book was to be an autobiography.

¹⁰⁵ British Library, MS Add 61930, f. 18.

¹⁰⁶ Peterson, p. 110.

who writes and the woman who appears on the pages: ‘the woman who is writing, and her whom I describe, are really two persons’.¹⁰⁷

Secondly, Alma, who represents Mathilde-the-poet, can be seen as a mask, an element that interested Blind’s contemporaries such as Oscar Wilde with whom Blind undoubtedly was acquainted.¹⁰⁸ Wilde’s essay ‘The Truth of Masks: A Note on Illusion’ explores the significance of costumes that create the image the actors present on stage, mostly focusing on productions of Shakespeare’s plays. One of Wilde’s points is that Shakespeare ‘saw how important costume is as a means of producing certain dramatic effects’.¹⁰⁹ Extending the concept of the mask/costume to a literary character, in this case Alma, we can further support the argument that the fragments are a fictionalised biography. Some parts of the mask can, for example, be seen in the detailed aspects of the discussion of the works of Biblical criticism and other literary texts that the young Alma had read. Whereas there is very little doubt that Blind would have read most of them, it is difficult to establish when exactly she did so. Similarly, with the mentions of reading/discussing/reciting of Shelley’s poetry, we do know that Blind read him before the 1870s and most likely during the time when she was a teenager; yet her first encounter and the origin of her obsession with the poet’s work are undocumented. Taking all of this into account we can conclude that even if the events in the typescript are in various degrees grounded in reality, based on the currently available information on Blind we cannot unambiguously support or reject the autobiographical nature of the fragments.

¹⁰⁷ Marie Bashkirtseff, *The Journal of Marie Bashkirtseff*, transl. Mathilde Blind (London: Cassell & Company, Ltd., 1890), p. 260.

See p. 158 n.19 and p. 175 n. 72 for more detail on Bashkirtseff.

¹⁰⁸ In addition to the translation of Bashkirtseff’s diary Blind published a two-part article on Marie Bashkirtseff in Oscar Wilde’s magazine *The Woman’s World* (‘Marie Bashkirtseff, the Russian Painter’, *The Woman’s World* 1, 351–56, 454–57); however, none of the consulted archival materials allow to presume that Blind and Wilde interacted on any other level rather than professional.

¹⁰⁹ Oscar Wilde, ‘The Truth of Masks’, *Collected Works of Oscar Wilde: The Plays, the Poems, the Stories and the Essays Including De Profundis* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2007), pp. 1017–1038, p. 1020.

However, bearing in mind the presence of the mask (Alma) in the text the thesis will treat this text as a Bildungsroman with biographical elements and the “biographical” facts present there will not be taken at face value.

This presumption is also supported by existing research into Victorian life writing. Linda H. Peterson identifies two traditions of Victorian autobiographical writing: ‘a professional author’s account of her aspirations and a domestic memoir,’ both of which can be applied to Blind’s fragments.¹¹⁰ The combination of the two aspects in the text is in no way surprising as, according to Carol Hanbery MacKay, an acceptable way for a Victorian woman writer to engage in life writing was through a ‘family memoir, which ostensibly followed the formula of the multivolumed “life and letters” of a great man but which also allowed the editor to insert herself into a relational narrative’ as the traditional mode of autobiography could be ‘met with charges of pride or egotism.’¹¹¹ MacKay further notes that issues connected to ‘gender constraints’ forced a lot of women authors ‘to introduce additional strategies, both conscious and unconscious, resulting in various hybrid forms.’¹¹² However, such modes of writing come with a challenge that affects the interpretation of these texts as ‘they are the product of unreliable narrators for whom self-reflection was a dangerous prospect.’¹¹³ This then supports the argument that the fragments should be explored with caution and without putting too much weight on, for example, the age in which Alma was reading certain texts or the truthfulness in her depiction of events. This remains true even if Diedrick’s biography provides possible connections between Blind’s life and these fragments, as he also notes the changes made

¹¹⁰ Peterson, 146.

¹¹¹ Carol Hanbery MacKay, ‘Life-writing’, *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Women Writers*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 159-70, p. 159-60.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

by Blind to the narrative. For example, Blind's story ends with Alma making up with a friend from school, with whom she had a disagreement on religious matters. Diedrick sees this conclusion as 'a fictional closure' for a real relationship written by 'the adult Mathilde Blind'.¹¹⁴ However, even if Diedrick admits to Blind fictionalising her life story, the fragments are still used as an important source to establish her biography.

The material held at the British Library is not the only one that provides information on *The Ascent of Man*. Other notable libraries include the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center of The University of Texas at Austin. Their collection contains several letters that are of use for establishing a wider context for Blind's social and intellectual life and the possible origins of *The Ascent of Man*. For example, the collection holds a letter from Blind to Swinburne that discusses Shelley's poetry and there are other letters that speak of Blind's friendship with, for instance, Charles Rowley.¹¹⁵ The Rowley letters, written after the death of Blind's long-time friend Ford Madox Brown, speak about the loss that they both experienced. In one of them, Rowley expresses concern about Blind's state of mind: 'your letter knocks me down somewhat for I feel for you as if I were next to you. I need some serious thought of running up to London and returning the same day just to cheer you a bit'.¹¹⁶ A similar subject matter is present in the two letters from Papers of Catherine Hueffer at the Parliamentary Archives.¹¹⁷ Both are written by Blind and addressed to Ford Madox Brown's daughter Catherine (1850-1927); their contents are especially touching as they speak of Blind's state of health a couple of months before her death. These letters, even if they are written after the

¹¹⁴ See Diedrick, *Blind*, loc. 628.

¹¹⁵ See chapter one section two for Shelley's influence on Blind.

¹¹⁶ HRC, Richard Garnett Collection, MS-1545, Container 10.6., undated letter to Blind from Charles Rowley (the only mention about the time is Friday).

¹¹⁷ STH/BH/1/4, Papers of Catherine Hueffer, Parliamentary Archives.

publication of the volume and do not refer to the poem, show Blind's social connections and supporting network as well as they show a more vulnerable and intimate side of her life. As noted earlier on Blind was aware of the importance of networking as means of accessing education and fostering intellectual development of women authors. However, as Alexis Easley states, 'it was challenging for women to find success in a male-dominated literary marketplace. Women who chose the literary life often faced social censure ... and fell subject to a critical double standard.'¹¹⁸

Another source that is relevant to the history of *The Ascent of Man* is the collection of letters sent to Blind by her publisher, Chatto and Windus, which forms part of the Random House archive held at the University of Reading. These letters provide information on the processes relating to publication and advertising of the volume, including the choice of the volume's cover (colour, material, type of gilding), the cost of production and advertisements, and the sales data. These previously unpublished materials give us an insight not only into Blind's relationship with her publisher and financial data on the volume but also demonstrate that Blind paid attention to every detail of the volume's life. As this source is of considerable importance for our understanding of the volume's history it will be explored in more detail in the second chapter.

Speaking of the material that is often used to establish a context for Blind's life and work we need to dwell on Richard Garnett's memoir of Blind, published as a part of *The Poetical Work of Mathilde Blind*, as it significantly contributes to her posthumous reputation. Of particular interest in this respect is Garnett's representation of Blind. Considering that they were close friends, it is likely that the memoir's main aim was to

¹¹⁸ Alexis Easley, 'Making a Debut' in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Women's Writing*, ed. Linda H. Peterson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, iBooks edition).

preserve interest in Blind's work. However, the manner in which Blind is presented and the tone of this work give the impression that Garnett does not see Blind as his equal, even if their correspondence, explored in the first chapter, presents evidence to the contrary. Wilson observes that even if the memoir is 'respectful' and is based on Blind's own material it 'silences her [Blind's] authentic voice'.¹¹⁹ This attitude, similar to Symons' meddling with the order of her poems, contributes to a change in readers' perception of Blind by attempting to make her appear more conventional. These issues feed into the already-discussed problem of conflation between women writer's works and lives, and highlights another problem typical for lesser-known women authors; as their work is not studied with the same attention as their male counterparts there is more chance that their histories will be "rewritten" rather than "recovered".

To complete the overview of the unpublished sources consulted for this thesis we need to mention five more archival collections. One of these sources is Blind's commonplace book, held at the Bodleian Library, which contains dates that help to establish the timeline for the composition of the volume. Another source is Blind's will held at the Principle Probate Registry Office in London; it will be used to demonstrate some of Blind's literary and social connections as well as to establish some elements of the posthumous destiny of her poems. Blind's letters to Karl Pearson, written in the first half of 1887, provide largely circumstantial evidence of Blind's life rather than adding to the material on *The Ascent of Man*. In addition to the above, a collection that provides useful contextual information is the Gosse Family Papers, held at the Cambridge University Library. Of particular interest is one of two letters from Blind to Edmund Gosse, from [28] December 1873, which contains a detailed opinion on Gosse's

¹¹⁹ Wilson, p. 101.

collection *On Viol and Flute* (1873). This second letter demonstrates not only that Gosse was a part of Blind's literary network but also that he valued her a critic. What is more, Blind attached a poem to the letter, sadly not preserved, which demonstrates that even if there was a fourteen-year break between her first (1867) and second (1881) volumes she continued to write poetry. The last archival source is the marked copies of *The Athenaeum* held at the City University London; the material they contain allows us to establish which articles Blind contributed to the periodical. None of the aforementioned sources has ever been explored in such a detail before. Even if some of the sources have to be treated with caution and are incomplete, they help to uncover previously unknown details about Blind's poetry and her literary circle.

The material presented above demonstrates why *The Ascent of Man* and Blind need to be researched with the level of attention that is not usually devoted to the works of non-canonical women writers. The benefits of this approach apply not only to an author whose work is scrutinized in such a manner, but it also allows us to develop a better understanding of literary practices and networks of the late nineteenth century. What is more, the information uncovered through this manner of investigation allows us to establish a greater cultural-historical awareness of the period, which could lead to a reassessment of the positions of some of the writers within the literary culture of the time.

To facilitate a better understanding of the volume's history, the thesis will be separated into three main chapters. The first chapter focuses on the intellectual background of the volume, identifying the people, ideas and texts that produced the deepest effect on *The Ascent of Man*. The significance of developing such a background knowledge is demonstrated in the late Frank Delaney's podcast on *Ulysses, Re:Joyce*, which explores James Joyce's novel almost word for word. Even if the writer and the

novel are well known and researched, the text contains a plethora of references to contemporary events, texts and people which would be lost on the reader unfamiliar with, for instance, Irish Catholicism or to a reader who would not be aware of the difference between the Catholic and Protestant names present in the novel. The same can be assumed of Blind's poetry, which was fed not only by her life in Germany, Belgium, England and other countries she had a prolonged stay in, but also by the immediate environment in which she spent her formative years.

The second chapter focuses on the creation of the volume as an artefact: it will discuss such elements of a volume's life as a timeline of composition, the actual process of composition, and the details pertaining to publication and advertising of the volume. The information presented is based almost exclusively on archival material. It should be noted that the data uncovered while researching this chapter informed the contents of the previous one as it helps to avoid misrepresentations similar to those present in Guminarães's essay. Following this the third chapter explores the reception of *The Ascent of Man* and separate poems from the volume, covering the period from the time it was published in 1889 till the last major posthumous publication in 1900 and by doing so attempts to establish why there was a turn in the reception of her works.

Abbreviations

As a more detailed description of each chapter will be discussed in the respective introductions the last point that needs to be mentioned here relates to the abbreviations and some of the most habitually used reference material. Thus, all of the Biblical passages are taken from the *King James Bible* and will be identified in the customary way by the book and verse numbers.¹²⁰ Similarly, the word-definitions are taken from the online edition of *Oxford English Dictionary* and the basic biographical data, such as lifespan or occupation, will be sourced from the online edition of *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. In addition to this, if multiple essays from the same collection are cited the full bibliographical data for the book will be included only in the first instance. It also needs to be noted that due to the absence of a lineated edition of *The Ascent of Man* page numbers along with line numbers will be used if the length of a poem extends beyond a couple of pages.

Following abbreviations will be used:

AoM — Mathilde Blind, *The Ascent of Man* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1889)

‘AoM’ — ‘The Ascent of Man’ (poem), as above.

BL — The British Library

C&W — Chatto & Windus

DNB — *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*

HRC — Harry Ransom Center

OED — *Oxford English Dictionary*

¹²⁰ *King James Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

‘PoA’ — ‘Poems of the Open Air’ in *The Ascent of Man*

Selection — Mathilde Blind, *A Selection from the poems of Mathilde Blind*, Arthur Symons, ed. (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1897)

Works — Mathilde Blind, *Poetical Works of Mathilde Blind*, Arthur Symons, ed. (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1900).

Chapter 1: Intellectual Origins of *The Ascent of Man*

Theodore Watts-Dunton's obituary of Mathilde Blind contains an astute observation of the main intellectual influences on her work:

In certain important points she was superior to George Eliot. She read the new cosmogony with the eyes of Shelley. The evidence of science and evolution against man in his pretensions to being the most important figure in the universe never for a moment cowed her enthusiasm as a Shelleyite. On the contrary, she managed somehow to retain Mazzini's optimism, which was merely a variation of the optimism of Rousseau and the French revolution, the optimism that accepted the noble savage as the ideal man robbed by civilization of his sweet and naked charms, and at the same time to accept the noble savage's grandfather, Darwin's famous "hairy animal" eating fruit on the tree tops. By leaving the past to take care of itself, and gazing at the future through Shelleyan spectacles, one may, it seems, see Darwin's protégé developing the wings that the French Revolution declared the noble savage had lost.¹

Comparing this passage with Blind's own account, recorded in an interview with the magazine *Hearth and Home*, one observes a number of similarities. On being asked to name her 'favourite authors whose writings had chiefly influenced her own opinions', Blind mentions 'Shakespeare, Shelley, Goethe, Byron, Heine, Tennyson, Swinburne, Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, Mill's *Liberty and Subjection of Women*, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Godwin's *life of his wife*, with Dickens's, George Eliot's, George Sand's and Charlotte Brontë's novels'.² It is more than likely that the list is incomplete as it does not mention either the works of Darwin or Mazzini's teachings; however, the influence of both intellectuals on *AoM* was mentioned earlier in the interview.³

¹ Theodore Watts-Dunton, 'Miss Blind', *The Athenaeum*, 5 Dec 1896, 796.

² Anon., 'Chats with Celebrities. Mathilde Blind', *Hearth and Home*, 24 December 1891, 165.

Hearth and Home – a newspaper that 'included those genres which had become the stale of journals targeted at middle-class women at home: advice on homes, gardens, and household management; needlework and fashion' and similar topics. (Margaret Rachel Beetham, 'Hearth and Home', *Dictionary of Nineteenth-century Journalism in Great Britain and Ireland*, ed. Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor (Gent and London: Academia Press and The British Library, 2009) p. 278.) Following this a short title will be given when referring to this dictionary.

³ There is also a note in the Blind collection held at the BL that contains a list of nature themed poems, for example, 'Byron, on a rose ... Burns, rose, primrose, daisy, etc. ... Cowper, the lily and the rose, —field flowers' (Add Ms 61928 ff. 56b-57); other names include such authors as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Felicia Hemans, William Wordsworth, Charlotte Smith, and Walter Scott However, because these were presented without additional context (such as a date or a connection to the poems she was working on) it can be used only to indicate the breadth of Blind's reading.

As there is no previous research that aims to establish *AoM*'s intellectual background, one cannot easily distinguish who or what produced the greatest effect on the ideas expressed in the volume. The most one can find on the topic consists of a number of arguments scattered throughout the existing literature on Blind and *AoM*; such a gap in the body of knowledge on Blind leads, as mentioned in the introduction to the thesis, to erroneous readings and, in turn, to a devaluation of Blind's literary heritage. Thus, to be able to select who from the aforementioned authors and intellectuals produced the greatest effect on the volume one first needs to explore the nature of influence and how the existing concepts can be applied to understanding Blind's work as well as to her recovery.

The broadest definition of influence can be found in OED: 'to affect the mind or action of; to affect the condition of, to have an effect on' for the verb and 'the exertion of action in which the operation is unseen or insensible (or perceptible only in its effects), by one person or thing upon the other'. However, in relation to poetry its meaning is considerably narrower; for example, according to *The New Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics* influence is usually connected 'with imitation and most often understood as the result of learning and technique'.⁴ These actions result, as most of the published works on this issue suggest, in the new generations of writers attempting to break with their predecessors as they become more established in their craft. Such a relationship between a poet and his or her precursor(s) was identified by T. S. Eliot, and in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' he notes its importance for understanding the merit of a particular poet: '[y]ou cannot value him [the poet] alone; you must set him, for

⁴ Alex Preminger and T. V. F. Brogan et al., *The New Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993). Accessed through the Literature Online database on 5/07/2015.

contrast and comparison, among the dead'.⁵ In addition to this, Eliot argues that one 'shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously'.⁶

A few years later W. Jackson Bate noted that 'many of us began to assume that the first requirement of the sophisticated poet, artist, or composer was to be as unlike his ... predecessors as possible'.⁷ Discussing various composite parts of influence Bate singles out the idea of originality, which combined 'with so many other things in life aside from the arts (especially the concept of progress in the cumulative sciences, social and historical as well as physical)' captured 'the conscience' from around the end of the eighteenth century.⁸ Thus, one of the ways to trace influence, suggested by Bate, consists of approaching a poet's biography in a more informed manner: 'a more psychologically and a more literarily informed [...] use of biography: a recognition of what the artist confronted in what were for him the most important things with which to struggle'.⁹

In contrast to Bate's historical approach to the concept of influence, another study published around the same time explores the same idea through Freud's idea of the Oedipus Complex — Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, which is still seen as a major contribution to the development of this idea.¹⁰ Bloom suggests that a poetic influence does not manifest itself as 'the transmission of ideas from earlier to later poets', which he sees as a realm of 'source-hunters' and 'biographers', but

⁵ T. S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, Vincent B. Leitch (ed.) (New York: Norton, 2001), pp. 1092-8, p. 1093.

⁶ Ibid., p. 1093.

⁷ W. Jackson Bate, *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1971), p. 21.

⁸ Ibid., p. 105.

⁹ Ibid., p. 115.

¹⁰ The theory was expanded by Bloom throughout several books that followed *The Anxiety of Influence*, such as *A Map of Misreading* (1975) or *The Anatomy of Influence: Literature as the Way of Life* (2011); however, the earlier text is still considered influential in the body of works on poetic influence.

through the reactions of the poet to the works of his or her predecessors: ‘every poem is a misinterpretation of a parent poem. A poem is not an overcoming of anxiety, but it is that anxiety’.¹¹ This emotion is what defines the relationship between the poets, for what makes a unique poet is ‘a poet’s stance, his Word, his imaginative identity’, all of which the poet has to preserve because otherwise ‘he’ll perish as a poet’.¹² On comparing this to Bate’s work, one can draw parallels between the ideas of originality and anxiety as both, in a way, suggest that there is a pressure of the past that a poet has to withstand.

It is not surprising that Bloom’s theory rather than Bate’s or Eliot’s ideas created a considerable number of critical replies. One of the most prominent criticisms is Bloom’s focus on male writers; the second chapter of Gilbert and Gubar’s *The Madwoman in the Attic*, justly observes that the then current research on the subject focuses mostly on male writers and mostly engage with Bloom’s interpretation of the theme. They argue that

[F]or ‘anxiety of influence’ the woman writer substitutes what we have called an ‘anxiety of authorship’, an anxiety built from complex and often only barely conscious fear of the authority which seems to the female artist to be by definition inappropriate to her sex.¹³

Gilbert and Gubar’s interpretation of Bloom’s theory still puts the writer within an externally imposed framework, limited not by the creative output of their predecessors, but by societal constraints which make writing an act of rebellion. Their ideas outlined in the chapter ‘Inflection in the Sentence: The Woman Writer and the Anxiety of Authorship’ suggest that because of long standing societal constraints women authors work differently than their male counterparts and therefore ‘Bloom’s male-oriented theory of the “anxiety

¹¹ Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence. A Theory of Poetry*. (New York, Oxford: OUP, 1997, 2nd ed), p. 71, p. 94.

¹² Ibid., p. 71.

¹³ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic. The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 51.

of influence” cannot be simply reversed or inverted in order to account for the situation of the woman writer.’¹⁴ Whereas this approach can be applied to literary works and authors who stand outside the dominant tradition not only because of their gender, but also class or race it would need sufficient modification to be used on an author who crossed literary and cultural traditions and whose key poetical predecessor was of a different gender.

Another way in which Bloom’s theory of ‘anxiety’ has been opposed refers to his use of the word “influence”. This can be seen in Robert Douglas-Fairhurst’s book *Victorian Afterlives* which argues that the way Bloom uses the concept of influence is rather narrow and quotes art historian Michael Baxandall’s considerable list of possible ways in which poet can interact with the works of the person he/she is influenced by. The passage, amongst other, includes such possible interactions as: draw on, adapt, misunderstand, refer to, remodel, simplify, elaborate on.¹⁵

These various approaches to the question of influence contain several points that need to be considered when deciding on the best approach for discussing *AoM*. In regard to Bloom’s argument there are two elements that make it inapplicable to *Blind*. Firstly, all of the authors his study is based on were known at the time when Bloom’s study was written thus requiring a completely different treatment to a lesser-studied writer such as *Blind*. The second point relates to Bloom’s idea that a strong poet can have only one precursor, who is also supposed to be a poet; furthermore, a poet cannot be influenced by his or her contemporaries, thinkers and the socio-cultural developments of the day. As most of the names recorded in Watts-Dunton’s account and *Blind*’s interview are either

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 48.

¹⁵ Robert Douglas-Fairhurst, *Victorian Afterlives: the Shaping of Influence in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (Oxford, New York: OUP, 2002), pp. 29, 30.

Blind's contemporaries or lived not too long before her, it leads one to question whether the idea of influence, when one speaks of poetry, should be limited to poetic predecessors or take a broader meaning to include the people and ideas which have affected the mind of a poet — key people who fostered the mind of the young poet and also encouraged and enabled her to pursue her craft. Such a broader approach is beneficial at this stage of recovery of *AoM*. The aim of this chapter is to build a “skeletal” map of the key people who produced the most effect on the volume prior to recognising and researching more minute struggles against predecessors and societal constraints in the poems. What is more, establishing who these key intellectuals are is especially important in Blind's case as she is working in a cultural environment other than the one she was born into.

Blind's heritage and her attitude are of importance for this discussion; as mentioned in the introduction she wished to be perceived as English and as well as chose to pursue a career in a different language and cultural framework to the one into which she was born. Here we have to emphasise the act of choosing, as Blind instead of working in her mother-tongue, like a few of her immigrant contemporaries, distanced herself from her ethnic origins in both the choice of her social circle and her profession. Terry Eagleton argues that ‘being brought up in a culture is a matter of learning appropriate forms of feeling as much as particular ways of thinking. And all of these are sedimented in that culture's language and behaviour so that to share a language is to share a form of life’.¹⁶ Both learning a culture seamlessly through being brought up in it and acquiring a new one through conscious actions later on in life, have tradition as a common element. Knowing these cultural codes allows a writer to measure her or himself against or be inspired by literary predecessors, which is another reason why the model of influence

¹⁶ Terry Eagleton, *How to Read a Poem* (Oxford; Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), p. 106.

proposed by Bloom is not the most fitting option to use on *AoM*. It is not only Blind's origin, upbringing and choice of culture that affects the idea of influence, but also that amongst her intellectual predecessors we see people who were her contemporaries and who produced a profound effect on Blind's understanding of the world. Thus if we were to use Bloom's theory in this instance it would limit our understanding of the ideas Blind tried to convey in the poems.

Gilbert and Gubar's way of treating influence would seem, at first glance, to be more appropriate for discussing Blind's work due to their focus on the recovery of women authors. However, at the centre of their attention are the issues related to anxiety rather than influence. Considering the themes present in Blind's work, such as the critique of religion present in 'The Prophecy of St Oran' or the description of difficulties faced by the crofters during the Highland Clearances, and her use of English equivalents of classical meters like the accentual hexameter, we might suggest that Blind was aiming to adopt a masculinised poetic persona rather than stay within the confines of traditionally feminine themes. What is more, her critical articles in *The Athenaeum* and other journalistic and critical writings, consulted while researching this thesis, suggest that her writing was not affected by a fear of transgressing the gender roles through being an artist. Another argument against using this approach for exploring *AoM* in terms of the anxiety of authorship is exactly the reason why it seemed appropriate in the beginning – the concept being linked exclusively to women authors. Such segregation might have been useful in the beginning when there was a need to demonstrate why Victorian women poets and novelists needed to be researched. However, separating them into a different category is disadvantageous as it hinders a more integrated understanding of Victorian literary culture.

Therefore, this chapter will approach the idea of influence as encompassing a variety of ways in which a poet can interact with his or her predecessors, as suggested by Douglas-Fairhurst. This thesis will define ‘precursors’ not only as other poets, regardless of their gender and the literary tradition to which they belong, but will also include in this category the work of significant individuals crucial for the development of ideas present in *AoM*. This should result in a more comprehensive approach to the volume and lead to a better understanding of Blind’s work and her place in the late-nineteenth-century literary milieu. One of the ways to see the validity of this approach is to explore Blind’s own opinions on the intellectuals and ideas that affected her perception of the world. The available records demonstrate not only who and what produced an effect on her understanding of the world and on *AoM*, but also allow one to test the validity of Bloom’s differentiation between influences and sources, with the latter being dismissed as unworthy of scholarly attention.¹⁷

From the available records, of particular interest are Blind’s memoir of Giuseppe Mazzini, comments on the effect of Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* on her understanding of nature and several lectures and essays on Percy Bysshe Shelley. All of these documents help one to trace Blind’s relationship with these thinkers and her reaction to their ideas, and explain how the concepts derived from their work later on developed into *AoM*. The more encompassing approach to establishing influence on a poet also affected how the subjects for this chapter were selected. From the three that were chosen, only the effect of Charles Darwin and his theories does not demand justification as *AoM*’s connection to them was and remains the element that primarily attracts critics’ and readers’ attention to this volume. Nevertheless, as the respective sections will

¹⁷ See Bloom, p. 7.

demonstrate, there still are some aspects that demand more exploration and elucidation, for example, Blind's recorded account of the effect produced on her by *The Origin of Species*.

In comparison to Darwin, the other two subjects of this chapter need more justification. Thus, Giuseppe Mazzini was selected as the thinker whose effect on Blind's education and on *AoM* was the longest lasting. Mazzini's effect on Blind stems from Blind's childhood and lasted through most of her life, as is evident from an essay she published in 1891, almost two decades after his death. There Blind notes the importance of his speeches as well as of him directing her studies, and ultimately defines Mazzini as one of the key people who affected her intellectual development. What is more, in one of the interviews she gave Blind stated that Mazzini's talks planted the seed for what later on became 'AoM'.¹⁸

Percy Bysshe Shelley's importance for Blind is acknowledged in nineteenth-century and contemporary sources. Blind's contemporaries knew of her championing the poet's work through lectures, articles and her involvement with the Shelley society and identified Blind as a capable critic of his work, all of which would have produced an overt or covert effect on her worldview and poetry. There are some obviously Shelleyan influences at work in Blind's poetry, from its overall commitment to human development and progress to the use of typically Shelleyan motifs and pseudo-allegorical devices. These resemblances have been examined in some of the contemporary works that study the Blind-Shelley connection but the importance of Shelley's ideas as well as his poetic example has not been emphasised sufficiently clearly. In identifying and examining not only the poems themselves but also Blind's articles and other contemporary contextual

¹⁸ See p. 74 for a detailed information on this.

material, this thesis will attempt to provide a fuller and more accurate picture of the extent of Blind's indebtedness to Shelley.

The decision to exclude others who might legitimately be regarded as significant influence – especially Elizabeth Barrett Browning and George Eliot – was influenced primarily by the evidence that Mazzini and Shelley, in particular, had a more enduring influence on the poet's intellectual development. There are undoubtedly similarities between the modified meliorism of *AoM* and George Eliot's emphasis on the gradual improvement of the human race through the unrecorded actions of individuals, but both can be seen as parallel developments of a common literary and cultural heritage.

As this chapter will demonstrate, all of the selected intellectuals contributed to the development of themes and concepts present in *AoM* and, amongst other things, allowed Blind to understand and learn the cultural codes of her new country, even if one of these people was not British. What is more, one has to consider her relationship with these thinkers and reaction to their ideas. The benefit of using such a model to approach a lesser-researched poet lies in its being inclusive of all the types of effect on a poet's intellectual formation and their manifestation in her works, which contributes to a deeper understanding not only of her literary heritage but of the one left by the whole period. Whereas this might suggest that Blind is being classified as 'weak' in Bloomian terms, this classification is not appropriate in this instance as Bloom's theory is not broad enough to approach a poet who inhabits several traditions.

Prior to moving on the main body of the chapter there is another issue that should be addressed here: the relationship between the terms "intellectual origins", present in this chapter's title, and "influence". As established in this introduction, for ascertaining the history of ideas present in *AoM* and other work by Blind it is beneficial to use the

term “influence” in its widest sense as it helps to unearth previously unknown intellectual and cultural connections. Intellectual origins, a term used in the title of the chapter, includes a number of the same elements as the broadest understanding of influence. Hence, it is a good descriptor to use in the title of the chapter as it directs the reader’s expectations toward the role of the chapter in exploring the roots of ideas present in the poem. Indeed, the decision to use this term rather than influence in the title of this chapter is grounded in the differences between the two terms. Influence, at least in the Bloomian formulation that has been dominant for the last forty years or so, typically does not encompass non-poetic predecessors, contemporary thinkers, cultural milieu, events and other notable life experiences, but limits itself to the major poets who preceded the author in question.

The term “intellectual origins” is also used to indicate that the primary focus is not the poet herself, but the volume of poetry. There is, of course, some overlap here, but this focus on the volume allows us to emphasise certain elements which might otherwise remain relatively insignificant. In the case of *AoM*, Darwin’s ideas are important for the volume, but the same cannot be said in relation to the rest of Blind’s work; Mazzini’s teachings, in contrast, are of substantial significance for all of her writing. This also feeds into the question whether there are any temporal limitations for the intellectual origins or intellectual formation, as these should be approached differently, depending on whether we look at a particular segment of an author’s work or at all of it together. Thus, when we speak about a volume or a poem, the time period for its formation can be seen as beginning at the moment when the idea of the poem originated in the poet’s mind, if such can be established, and ending when the last substantial alterations are made. The volume

has a material history of its own, during which time it is open to changing literary, cultural, and social circumstances.

1.1. Giuseppe Mazzini: a Modern Prophet

1867 saw the publication of a collection of poetry by Blind, published under the pseudonym Claude Lake, with the very simple title *Poems*. Its significance for the present chapter lies in the dedication of this volume: ‘To Joseph Mazzini, the prophet, martyr, and hero, these poems are dedicated, in undying gratitude and reverence’.¹⁹ Twenty-four years later, in 1891, *Fortnightly Review*, between ‘The Midnight Baptism, A Study in Christianity’ by Thomas Hardy and ‘The Transatlantic Cattle Trade’ by Moreton Frewen, there was an article signed by Mathilde Blind. It contains a sentiment toward Mazzini similar to that expressed by Claude Lake: ‘To have known [him] is to understand those mythical and historical figures who...have influenced a new spirit into the outworn religion of their age’.²⁰ The likeness is not surprising since both sentences were written about the same person and both show a reverence that lasted for over a quarter of a century, demonstrating the importance of the person who inspired it: Italian revolutionary Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-1872).

Mazzini was an Italian politician, journalist and writer who was one of the key people behind the eventual unification of Italy. By many of his contemporaries, such as Malvida von Meysenbug, Mazzini was perceived as a larger-than-life figure.²¹ This quality paired with his eloquence, as the relevant section, of the first chapter

¹⁹ Mathilde Blind as Claude Lake, *Poems* (London: Alfred W. Bennett, 1867), unnumbered page.

²⁰ Blind, ‘Personal Recollections of Mazzini’, *Fortnightly Review*, May 1891, 702-712, 702.

²¹ For an example of Meysenbug’s opinion see p. 74 and below.

demonstrates, were those that produced impact not only on Mathilde, but also on her stepfather and many others who came in contact with Mazzini. Mazzini's political activities caused him to spend most of his life in exile, with much of his time after 1837 being spent in London, which, according to Roland Sarti became 'his headquarters'.²² During this time Mazzini 'opened a school for the children of Italian workers, reorganised Young Italy [...] and won international recognition as the voice of oppressed nationalities'²³ During his life Mazzini authored 106 volumes, 'where he articulated his political, social, and philosophical positions [...], these volumes also contain Mazzini's reflections on literary and aesthetic subjects'.²⁴ His philosophy, a hybrid of exalted moral sentiment and idealist philosophy, was a profound influence not only on Blind, but also on a number of other radical thinkers of the early and mid-nineteenth century.

It needs to be kept in mind that, unlike the other subjects discussed in this chapter, Mazzini is the only one whom Blind met in person. More importantly, they interacted during the time when, according to Blind, 'the most abiding impressions, those which the future author will reproduce most vividly' are being absorbed.²⁵ Even though this was said about George Eliot's life, it is possible that Blind was drawing on her own experiences, since during the 1850s, a decade that covered Blind's teenage years, her life drastically changed, providing a plethora of new experiences and impressions. The most vital of these include the family's move to England and the resulting change of social standing as well as the death of her younger brother; all of these would have made a lasting imprint on a young mind. Meeting Mazzini and their ensuing friendship is another

²² Roland Sarti, *Italy: A Reference Guide from the Renaissance to the Present* (New York: Facts on File), p. 400.

²³ Ibid., p. 400.

²⁴ Norma Bouchard, 'Giuseppe Mazzini' in ed Gaetana Marrone et al., *Encyclopaedia of Italian Literary Studies* (London: Routledge, 2007) pp. 1174-6, p.1175.

²⁵ Blind, *George Eliot*, p. 22.

result of the aforementioned experiences which produced a lifelong effect on Blind's understanding of the world.

Existing studies on Blind's poetry do not pay enough attention to their friendship. For example, in Angela Thirlwell's *Into the Frame*, he is referred to only as a member of Karl Blind's social circle and as the person to whom Blind devoted her first poetry collection.²⁶ The other works on Blind speak of Mazzini in a similar manner, as a figure in Blind's early years, or as someone whose path crossed with the German emigrant community. Neither author examines their friendship in detail or the larger implications of Mazzini's influence on Blind's writing. A comparable approach is present in the current biographical literature on Mazzini, where Blind is also mentioned merely as one of Mazzini's female acquaintances. For instance, Denis Mack Smith's biography describes Blind as belonging to a group of his female friends which also included George Sand, Malwida von Meysenbug, and Fanny Wedgwood.²⁷ Therefore, this section aims not only to trace the crucial elements of Mazzini's philosophy that affected Blind's worldview and *AoM* but also to contextualise their relationship by using contemporary accounts of another German emigrant who belonged to Mazzini's close circle. The additional context helps to provide better insight into the mechanics of Mazzini's effect on Blind and in turn allows his effect on the volume to be better evaluated.

²⁶ See Thirlwell, *Into the Frame*, pp. 169, 181, 182, 185-6.

²⁷ Denis Mack Smith, *Mazzini* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1994), pp. 94-5.

Fanny Wedgwood (1800-1889; née Francis Mackintosh).

Malwida von Meysenbug (1816-1903), a German emigrant and writer, friend of Mazzini's who belonged to the same circle as the Blinds. She published a number of memoirs such as *Memories of an Idealist*, *Der Lebensabend einer Idealistin* (1898) and *Individualitäten*. Some of these texts, such as the latter, contain von Meysenbug's opinion on Mazzini including his revolutionary work and his philosophy. (N.B. Mack Smith writes her name as 'Malvida').

According to her recollection of Mazzini, it was during meetings at his quarters in Brompton where the seeds for what was to become 'AoM' (if not *AoM*), were sown:

The idea possibly first took root in my mind when, as a mere girl, I used to go to Mazzini's little room in Brompton, and with my whole soul on tip toe with eagerness, heard him dwell on the progressive stages of man's development as the central fact in history.²⁸

Mazzini's small room, where 'every evening he himself transformed the sofa to the bed' gathered a number of his closest friends.²⁹ There, according to von Meysenbug, 'if he was not too tired, he stood in front of the fireplace and talked about things that preoccupied him at the time. All of us hung unto every single word since everything he spoke of was high and noble even if one did not agree with his views.'³⁰ Blind and von Meysenbug both note the effect of Mazzini's rhetorical skills and indicate that they were a key element in his influence. Something similar is noted by Karl Blind: 'as soon...as [Mazzini] opened his lips, the fire of eloquence shed a ray of youth over his warm and worn features'.³¹

Given that these recollections portray Mazzini as a highly charismatic, opinionated orator who produced an effect on every person with whom he came into contact, it can be presumed that his speeches were one of the main channels through which Blind became acquainted with his ideas on the workings of the world. This is also

²⁸ Anon. 'Interview. Miss Mathilde Blind', *Women's Penny Paper*, 14 June 1890, 397-8, 397.

Garnett's memoir also quotes Blind's statement on the effect of Mazzini's speeches: 'I hang with my whole soul upon his every word, I drink them all in with the same greediness with which a flower drinks in the rain, and I should like to remember every single word for ever' (p. 16).

²⁹ Malwida von Meysenbug, *Individualitäten* (Berlin und Leipzig: Schuster & Loeffler, 1902, Zweite auflage), p 536. Translation mine; all of the following excerpts from von Meysenbug's texts will be translated by me unless otherwise specified. The original text will be provided in the footnotes.

'Er bewohnte ein kleines Zimmer, in dem er sich jeden Abend selbst das Sopha zum Bett herrichtete.'

³⁰ von Meysenbug, p. 536;

'War er nicht zu sehr ermüdet, so nahm er meist seinen Platz vor dem Kamin stehend ein und redete über das, was ihn gerade am meisten beschäftigte; dann hingen wir alle an seinen Lippen, denn es war immer hoch und edel, was er sagte, auch wenn man seine Ansicht nicht teilte.'

³¹ Karl Blind, 'The Life and Labours of Mazzini', *The Dark Blue*, May 1872, 314-324, 315.

corroborated in another statement by Blind which contrasts Mazzini's writings and speeches: 'all the writings of Mazzini, however powerful, are but a pale reflection of his own impressive and apostolic individuality'.³² Furthermore, the importance of Mazzini's talks for Blind can also be seen in her habit of making 'records of his talk and teaching...[and preserving the] conversation[s] under the heading of "Words of Life"'.³³ This chosen title, as well as the fact that she carefully recorded and preserved his teachings, indicates that Mazzini's ideas formed something similar to a set of principles which she intended to peruse repeatedly.³⁴

Mazzini's effect on Blind was produced not only through his rhetorical abilities, but also through guiding her reading. Like his talks, this "guided reading" was not unique to Mazzini's friendship with Blind; von Meysenbug's *Individualitäten* includes a description of a "book club" organised by Mazzini: 'I joined a book group for which Mazzini selected and provided the books. I lived the closest to him in the way of circulation, so he sent me the books, usually accompanied by a note that referred to the previous talks or contained tasks for me'.³⁵ Blind's recollections contain comparable information on the guided reading which had a more personal touch.³⁶ According to these,

³² Blind, 'Recollections', 703.

³³ Ibid., 703.

It is interesting to note that Mathilde's recollections of Mazzini were republished in *The Review of Reviews*, May 1891, p. 460 as well as the fact that she published the memoir nineteen years after Mazzini's death. The journalist reviewing Blind's piece describes it as 'the most interesting article in the Fortnightly Review.' It is also of value to note that this article describes Mazzini as "the apostle", something that Blind and others compare him to.

As for Blind's records, it is not known whether these records survived and if yes where they are stored.

One also should mention that there were several parallels with German literature. Firstly, there is *Gespräche mit Goethe* (translation: *Conversations with Goethe*, 1836 and 1848) published by Goethe's personal secretary Johan Peter Eckermann. Another work that should be mentioned is Bettina von Arnim's *Goethes Briefwechsel mit einem Kinde* (*Goethe's Correspondence with a Child*, 1835), which was thought to be authentic at the time.

³⁴ This is especially significant because Blind draws on to these notes to write her recollections of Mazzini.

³⁵ von Meysenbug, pp. 537-8.

'Ich war einer Lesegesellschaft beigetreten, für die Mazzini die Auswahl der Bücher besorgte. Ich wohnte ihm auf dem Wege der Circulation am nächsten, und so schickte er mir die Bücher, gewöhnlich mit einem begleitenden Worte, welches Bezug auf vorhergegangene Gespräche oder auf Aufträge, die er mir gegeben hatte, enthielt.'

³⁶ Blind's records do not specify whether she was part of that "bookclub" or not, which makes it difficult to ascertain how personal this exchange was.

Blind was supposed to read contemporary scientific texts and pay less attention to such disciplines as philosophy, since the latter ‘will do [you] no good ... [because] it will teach you thought about thought’.³⁷ Mazzini believed that ‘thought, while confined to the regions of philosophy, is unfruitful ... it is incapable of modifying social life unable to incarnate itself in, and direct the action of mankind.’³⁸

From the modern sciences, Blind was especially encouraged to read astronomy and geology since these would help to ‘make her familiar with the laws unfolded by that astonishing science [astronomy], and when you have grasped its elements, dive down, through geology, to the forces that have elaborated our globe’.³⁹ Here we already can see the roots of ‘AoM’ as the poem, especially in the first two cantos of ‘Chaunts’, devotes a considerable amount of attention to the creation of the earth and the planet’s early development. Indeed, on perusing the first lines of ‘Chaunts’ one can see that a few of them are devoted to ‘the forces that have elaborated our globe’; an example can be seen in the opening lines of the first canto where Blind describes the very first moments of the planet.⁴⁰ It is likely that Mazzini recommended some of the books such as Charles Lyell’s *Principles of Geology* and Robert Chambers’s *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*, which were popular at the time and also named as the texts read by the protagonist of Blind’s unfinished manuscript held at the BL. However, Blind’s article on Mazzini does not mention a list of books that go together with the extract above.

After learning about science Blind was to turn to history ‘from the most primitive times to our own’ and she wanted to depict ‘the different systems of philosophy each in

³⁷ Blind, ‘Recollections’, 707.

³⁸ Mazzini, *Life and Writings of Joseph Mazzini* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co, 1890), vol. 2, p. iv.

³⁹ Blind, ‘Recollections’, 707.

⁴⁰ See p. 119 for the relevant excerpt.

connection with the period it sprang from—Plato, Descartes, Spinoza in their historical sequence'.⁴¹ Then, 'when you have discovered that the laws which govern history are in harmony with those which rule the heavens and the earth, the meaning of life will grow clear, and it is that which it concerns you above all things to know'.⁴² All of these elements in one or the other form can be found throughout the title poem; for instance, they can be traced in the way Blind organised the historical part of the narrative or the search for the harmony that belongs to the part of the narrative connected to the figure of Love.⁴³

Based on this reading plan, it appears that Mazzini's intent was to present Blind with a well-rounded education which would allow her to develop a comprehensive understanding of human history and the composition of the world. In relation to 'AoM' this knowledge would have created the greatest effect on the first part of the poem due to its historical elements and the passages on the origin of the early religions.⁴⁴ Also, it should be noted that Mazzini not only counselled Blind on the general direction and areas of her reading as elucidated above, but also on individual authors. For instance, he advised against reading Carlyle as his works 'could only lead [you] astray'.⁴⁵ This is likely because even if Carlyle and Mazzini were personal friends they had some disagreements on the treatment of history; as Roland Sarti observes, Mazzini 'would not look at history through the eyes of prominent and powerful figures, unlike' Carlyle, but preferred to focus his attention on large-scale movements of the human mind and spirit.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Ibid., 707.

⁴² Ibid., 708.

⁴³ This element will be also mentioned throughout the other sections in the chapter.

⁴⁴ For example, see canto 3 from 'Chaunts of Life' that describes how the primitive gods were established. In the following cantos, one can find references to various religions including Christianity.

⁴⁵ Blind, 'Recollections', 707.

⁴⁶ Roland Sarti, *Mazzini: a Life of Religion and Politics* (Westport: Praeger, 1997), p. 6.

As can be seen from Garnett's 'Memoir', however, Blind did not entirely follow this advice; Garnett states that Carlyle's influence on Blind was perhaps greater than that of George Eliot.⁴⁷ From Blind's biography of George Eliot one can see that Carlyle was not the only author Blind discussed with Mazzini, as Blind quotes him in discussion of the novels.⁴⁸ It is also worth noting that Mazzini's approach to guiding Blind's education was based on his general ideas on education as described in Bolton King's biography of Mazzini: 'He had a skeleton programme as a basis of citizen training,—“a course of nationality, including a summary picture of the progress of humanity, national history, and a popular statement of the principles which rule the country's legislation”'.⁴⁹ The excerpts from Blind's recollection demonstrate that the proposed reading list was in accord with Mazzini's ideas on a curriculum for citizen training and so corroborates Blind's records. This level of mentoring and general interaction shows that Mazzini's effect on Blind was potentially the most profound of all of the subjects covered in this chapter.

Returning to the topics outlined in Mazzini's study plan for Blind, special attention should be given to his advice to explore such subject areas as the contemporary sciences and history. It can be presumed that a long-term effect of this counsel was Blind's interest in Darwin's work and the resulting creation of 'AoM', which incorporates several elements relating to these sciences, such as the geological elements in her description of the creation of Earth as well as the fact that her attempt to create an overview of human history from the arrival of early man till the early nineteenth century

⁴⁷ Garnett. 'Memoir', p. 19.

Nevertheless, Carlyle's ideas were antagonistic to Blind's nature and persuasions due to Carlyle's contempt for the innocent enjoyments of life.

⁴⁸ See p. 91.

⁴⁹ Bolton King, *Life of Mazzini* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1911), pp. 274-5.

takes up the entirety of ‘Chaunts of Life’.⁵⁰ This latter aspect has greater importance if seen in conjunction with Mazzini’s advice for exploring human history, that is ‘from most primitive times to our own’, which describes the manner in which the first part of ‘AoM’ presents the material. Indeed, Blind separates ‘Chaunts of Life’ into six sections, with each representing a different stage of human history separated from the others by a distinctive “creed”. The second canto and the beginning of the third provide an example of this approach. The former ponders early flora and fauna, the survival-based relationships in the animal kingdom and the appearance of early humans. All of these are presented in clearly-defined segments arranged in a sequence starting with ocean creatures (ll. 19-24) and ending with humans (ll. 97-126). Furthermore, Blind presents not only the larger stages of development in clearly demarcated stages, she also uses this approach in passages that conflate longer periods of time, as can be seen in the following stanza:

From age to dumb unnumbered age,
 By dim gradations long and slow,
 He reaches on from stage to stage,
 Through fear and famine, weal and woe
 And, compassed round with danger, still
 Prolongs his life by craft and skill.
 (‘Chaunts’, II, ll. 115-120, p. 15)

Blind’s treatment of history recalls ‘the progressive stages of man’s development’, a concept to which she was exposed as a little girl. It should be noted that the idea of these stages of development is not specific to Mazzini and was a popular concept in nineteenth-century thinking. However, based on Blind’s recollections, it seems likely that she was exposed to these ideas initially through Mazzini’s talks and so, for her, this view of history

⁵⁰ This can also be traced in some of Blind’s previous works where in ‘The Prophecy of Saint Oran’ she explores religious history and in *The Heather on Fire* that addresses history and politics.

was probably connected primarily with Mazzini rather than other thinkers such as Auguste Comte, Georg Hegel, Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, and Karl Marx, all of whom used the idea of stages in describing historical developments.

However, Mazzini was not the only one who affected Blind's understanding of history and the development of the world. The effect of Darwin's theories can, if on a lesser scale than Mazzini's, also be traced in the passages that address these themes.⁵¹ Thus, Blind's vision of human development is presented in a manner that sees humans evolving from one stage to the next by developing 'craft and skill'. In addition, she presents this as a movement forward, an element more akin to Mazzini's philosophy than to Darwin's, which was a common misunderstanding of Darwin's theories in the late nineteenth century. One example of this approach can be found in the last stanza of the second canto. It first describes early humans acquiring the set of skills necessary to make fire: 'With cunning hand he shapes the flint, / He carves the horn with strange device...till one day there flies/a spark of fire from out the stone' ('Chaunts', II, ll. 121-2 and 24-5, p. 15). This then allows them to evolve forward from the cave people of the second canto to a more settled, hunter-gatherer society involving the division of labour (ll. 20, 22-25) and primitive abodes built using a previously learned skill at a more advanced level:

He'll fire the bush whose flames shall help him fel [sic]
The trunks to prop his roof, where he may dwell
...
Sheltered from drenching rains or noxious glare
when the sun holds the zenith
('Chaunts', ll. 10-11, 13, p. 17)

⁵¹ See the third section of this chapter on Darwin's effect on *AoM*.

However, the acquisition of new skills and their subsequent employment at a more advanced level is not the only way in which Blind signals different phases of human development. For instance, the appearance of the first ‘gods’ indicates a growing need for protection and understanding of the universe, especially during the time of need including events such as the fire that destroyed all of mankind’s hard work and possessions (ll. 56-65, p. 20) or the sudden death of the animals (ll. 66-69, p. 20). This need for explanation and safety here can be seen as Blind introducing distance between the natural world and humankind without overtly implying that humans are different to everything else in the world. Blind’s account can be compared to Friedrich Engels’s work ‘Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State’. Engels describes a similar distancing from the times when humans had a more equal division of labour and its fruits to the nineteenth century when society is plagued by inequality, with the change being caused by the development of private property. Nevertheless, as will be repeatedly demonstrated throughout this section, such ideas can be described as being developed under Mazzini’s influence as it is highly likely that Blind would have absorbed them through his talks or guided reading.

Here, one encounters another concept of Mazzini’s which also relates to the development of humankind and is part of the set of ideas that includes duty and religion: perfectibility. A clear overview of these principles can be found in von Meysenbug’s description of Mazzini’s philosophy.⁵² The passage in question stems from her book, *Individualitäten*, which devotes a separate chapter to Mazzini and describes a chance

⁵² Meysenbug’s chapter demonstrates some parallels in her and Blind’s perception of Mazzini. Thus Meysenbug describes him as one of the noblest people that she ever knew, an observation akin to Blind’s, which was quoted at the beginning of this section. Meysenbug, *Individualitäten*, p. 529 ‘einer der edelsten Menschen, denen ich auf meinem langen Lebensweg begegnet bin’. Apart from Mazzini Meysenbug’s book contains chapters on the Decembrists, Nietzsche, the women question and Mazarini.

meeting between him and von Meysenbug which resulted in Mazzini explaining his life view (seine Lebensanschauung auseinanderzusetzen):

For him the ground of all being was a spiritual principle, which he called God; from him flowed all the ideas of the good, the true, the beautiful, the achievement of which in life is our task and duty. He compared the existence with a spiral running round a high mountain; from each higher point one can see more of the distance travelled, but only on the top, one could look over the whole and completely understand the inner connection, reason and purpose of the existence. The perfectibility of the world was to him a dogma, and faith without deed meant nothing to him; if he would have translated the Bible, he would have written: 'In the beginning was the deed.'⁵³

The excerpt presents two key points. First, it speaks of the concept of perfectibility, described in terms of an upwards movement, and allows us to presume that Blind's depiction of history is a combination of Mazzini's and Darwin's philosophies where the ideas of the former author are present in greater proportion and form the base for the other's concepts. The second notable point is the introduction of the interconnected ideas of duty and religion, which are also present in Blind's account of Mazzini and in 'AoM'.

Before moving forward to explore these two concepts and their relationship with Blind's writing, it would be prudent to corroborate von Meysenbug's account with the help of Mazzini's own writing. Amongst Mazzini's essays, his text on Byron and Goethe, which contains two passages that outline his ideas on history, life, and religion, can be singled out. The first excerpt addresses a number of concepts he associates with progress—namely, evolution and the perfectibility of humankind:

earthly life being but one stage of the eternal evolution of life, manifested in thought and action; strengthened by all the achievements of the past, and advancing from age to

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 534-5.

'Der Grund alles Seins war ihm ein geistiges Prinzip, welches er Gott nannte; aus ihm flössen alle Ideen des Guten, Wahren, Schönen, deren Verwirklichung im Leben unsere Aufgabe und Pflicht sei. Er verglich das Dasein mit einer um einen hohen Berg herumlaufenden Spirale; von jedem höheren Punkt aus sähe man ein grösseres Stück des zurückgelegten Wegs, aber erst auf dem Gipfel würde man das Ganze überschauen und den inneren Zusammenhang, Grund und Zweck des Daseins, ganz verstehen. Die Perfectibilität der Welt war ihm ein Dogma, und Glaube ohne Tat bedeutete ihm nichts; hätte er die Bibel übersetzt, er hätte geschrieben: "Im Anfang war die Tat."'

ages towards a less imperfect expression of that idea. Our earthly life is one phase of the eternal aspiration of the soul towards progress, which is our law; ascending in increasing power and purity from the finite towards the infinite; from the real towards the ideal; from that which is, towards that which is to come.⁵⁴ [emphasis mine]

The second passage speaks about poetry that addresses social issues and touches upon the place of religion in human life:

in our own day, we are beginning, though vaguely, to foresee this new social poetry, which will soothe the suffering soul by teaching it to rise towards God through humanity; because we now stand on the threshold of a new epoch, which, but for them, we should not have reached.⁵⁵

Comparing the passages above to von Meysenbug's account reveals the recurring notion of perfectibility that supports Blind's and von Meysenbug's reception of the concept as well as the observation of its presence in 'AoM'. Another element present in both Mazzini's text and von Meysenbug's account of his ideas is what in modern terms can be described as 'spirituality', a concept which, based on the available autobiographical writing of Mazzini, was of considerable importance to him. Indeed, it can be concluded from the corpus of Mazzini's writings that he believed spirituality to be one of the key aspects of a functioning society, which was directly connected to the state of its morals. Here again, the depiction of the development of humankind is portrayed as a forward-moving process (see the underlined fragment above) which is comparable to von Meysenbug's depiction of history progressing as a spiral path going around the mountain.

Prior to delving into a further discussion of AoM one has to mention another element present in Mazzini's philosophy: the concept of duty, which was noted by a few of the authors who wrote about him, including Blind, von Meysenbug, Bolton King, and

⁵⁴ Giuseppe Mazzini, 'Byron and Goethe' in *Harvard Classics. Literary and Philosophical Essays*, Vol. 32, ed. Charles W. Eliot, (New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1909–14; Bartleby.com, 2001), <http://bartleby.com/32/701.html> (accessed 10/11/ 2011).

⁵⁵ Ibid.

N. Gangulee.⁵⁶ For instance, King writes, ‘his theory of Duty expanded till it penetrated every cranny of the individual soul’.⁵⁷ Throughout King’s biography, the notion of duty penetrates every aspect of society as the reason for beginning social reforms and one of the reasons the middle classes would rise. All of the points mentioned above come together in an observation of Blind’s: ‘what made Mazzini so great in my eyes was that he tried to grasp life as a whole’.⁵⁸ This idea is important for Blind as she is also trying to make sense of human life in its entirety in ‘AoM’, which, amongst other things, discusses the condition of England, as well as in ‘PoA’, where she looks at the measured, ever-repeating change of seasons and the countryside events that recur year after year, such as sowing and harvesting. Furthermore, these ideas are reflected in Mazzini’s opinion that poetry should provide ‘pastoral care’ for its readers by attempting to raise their souls ‘towards God through humanity’.⁵⁹ Although the idea of God was not entirely convincing for Blind, she attempts to include moral elements in a number of the poems in ‘PoA’, and this element informs the previously mentioned social criticism in *AoM*. To provide a brief example, in ‘AoM’, instead of searching for God, the soul is aiming for a world which is more in tune with nature and which preserves a certain “goodness”. The soul’s attempt to achieve this undefined quality can also be seen as building on Mazzini’s idea of earthly life as the ‘eternal aspiration of the soul towards progress’.⁶⁰

A further outline of how Mazzini influenced Blind’s perception of the world can be seen in her memoir, in which she touches upon his perception of faith, history, and

⁵⁶ Giuseppe Mazzini, Nagendranath Gangulee, *Selected writings* (London: L. Drummond, Limited, 1945).

⁵⁷ King, p. 56.

⁵⁸ Blind, ‘Recollections’, 703.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 702.

⁶⁰ Mazzini, ‘Byron and Goethe’.

Cp Matthew Arnold’s description of God as ‘the Eternal Power, not ourselves, that makes for righteousness’ *Literature and Dogma. An Essay Towards a Better Apprehension of the Bible* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1883), p. 348.

poetry and focuses on issues that were of particular importance for or directed at her. For example, the concept of religion and/or a deity is present not only in his more educational-style talks but also in the counsel given by Mazzini to Blind which was of a more personal nature; this provides additional proof that the level of Blind's exposure to his ideas was substantial. This argument is also supported by the type of advice he gave to her, such as the following regarding character building: 'it is not from me, dear troubled one, it is from yourself that you must draw strength and comfort. It is by reaching through your own efforts, faith: faith in duty and immortality...as intuition to the intellect, so are those moments to the soul'.⁶¹ The personal nature of this advice not only demonstrates that Blind and Mazzini were close but also supports the idea that the notions of duty and religion were most likely conveyed to Blind by Mazzini. The importance of religion/spirituality can also be seen in Mazzini's definition of it: 'the bond that unites men in the communion of a recognized generating Principle, and in the consciousness of a common tendency and mission'.⁶²

There are two main areas in 'AoM', which are of particular interest make it possible to trace Blind's engagement with religion. The first is the presence and

⁶¹ Blind, 'Recollections', 709.

Something similar is quoted in Garnett's memoir 'He said I was too impatient, and demanded that the aims of my life should grow up in one night like mushrooms. I ought to make myself clear about life and the world, learn to understand their plan and results in general and particular.' p.16.

Their personal connection can also be seen in a letter written by Mazzini to Emilie Venturi (née Ashurst): in the letter from June 6, 1867 Mazzini writes: 'Mathilde, I think, is carrying on a love affair with another invisible man'. The following letters or other available material do not give an indication of who this invisible man is. E. F. Richards, *Letters*. p. 171.

⁶² Mazzini, *Life and Writings*, vol. 5 p. 314.

The idea of duty was a popular concept in Victorian society. As Asa Briggs notes, duty alongside with honour was at the centre of several forms of leadership (see Asa Briggs, 'Victorian Values' in *In Search of Victorian: Values Aspects of Nineteenth-century Thought and Society*, Eric M. Sigsworth ed. (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1988) pp., 10-26, p. 21). Duty's cultural importance can also be seen formats presence in Dickens' and Eliot's work as well as from such publications as Samuel Smile's *Duty* (1880). To give a bit of background on Mazzini's interpretation of duty one can compare it to another thinker that Blind admired John Stuart Mill. One of the works where he writes about duty is the essay *On Liberty*, which identifies 'duty to oneself' (includes self-respect and self-development), which also feeds in to 'duty to others'. Mazzini's concept of duty, as presented by Blind, is more akin to the duty to society where the good of everyone takes precedence over individual.

positioning of actual gods and religions within Blind's narrative. In a number of places, their nature can be described as dictatorial, such as in the following description of the early gods from the fourth canto of 'Chaunts of Life':

Creature of hopes and fears,
Of mirth and many tears,
He makes himself a thousand costly altars,
Whence smoke of sacrifice,
Fragrant with myrrh and spice,
Ascends to heaven as the flame leaps and falters;
Where, like a king above the Cloud control,
God sits enthroned and rules Man's subject soul
(*'Chaunts'*, IV, ll. 9 -16, p. 27).

These lines depict an unspecified religion at its dawn, which was introduced based on early humanity's growing need to understand the world and the desire to know its destiny. Based on the malevolent portrayal of the gods and their comparison to kings demanding sacrifice, this depiction seems to have little connection to Mazzini's ideas of religion as a unifying element, which also gives purpose to its followers. There are several possible ways to interpret Blind's manner of describing the historical divinities. One of these is the possibility that Blind was affected by the ideas of such authors as Max Müller, whose work on comparative mythology she would have read earlier. Another way to understand this approach could be that Blind wanted to differentiate the intellectual stages of development where the ultimate goal would be to have a well-rounded grasp of the world, which is tightly connected with Love. In this regard Blind feeds into the existing depiction of the development of religion as moving from fear of god to seeing him as an animating principle.

This, then, introduces the second aspect of Blind's use of religion, which is primarily concerned with 'Love', a concept which is personified and present in the poem

from the moment the Earth is created till the very last stanza, when it is resurrected and, in a Christ-like manner, gives hope for the forward development of humankind. If read through the framework of traditional religion (and Christianity in particular, which would be the most familiar one to her readers), 'Love' can be seen as a substitute for both Jesus Christ and God. This can be inferred, for example, from the presence of Love at the exact moment when the world was created:

Lo, moving o'er chaotic waters,
 Love dawned upon the seething waste,
 Transformed in ever new avatars
 It moved without or pause or haste:
 Like sap that moulds the leaves of May
 It wrought within the ductile clay
 ('Chaunts', II, ll.1-6, p. 9).

In these lines, Blind conflates a scientific approach to the creation of Earth with elements from the Christian and Hindu religions as well as Pantheism, which can be interpreted as presenting the story of origin as something universal which transcends time and culture but that can also be updated as a result of new discoveries.⁶³ This depiction of the origin myth as transcending time and culture can also be seen as rooted in Mazzini's explanation of the universal deity: 'He is not the Christian God. He is not the arbitrary dispenser of grace. He has made laws; He has given you powers and liberty; He has put before you evil, so that you fight it'.⁶⁴ Furthermore, the resurrection of 'Love' after its death for the sins of humankind in order to redeem humanity and give hope for the future is also a tale common in a number of religions which existed prior to Christianity. By

⁶³ Blind's inclusion of a word from Hindu mythology, "avatar", that refers to 'the earthly forms in which various deities visited the human realm' could be seen as a result of her reading Müller, who extensively researched Indian mythology. Albeit it is known that Blind read Müller's work, there is no evidence that she borrowed this word from him.

⁶⁴ Blind, 'Recollections', 709.

Here one has to note that Mazzini's concept of God relates to the rational Theism of Enlightenment and the religious ideas of the French Revolution (the Cult of the Supreme Being) in the God transcending the Christian.

removing all traces that would identify a particular religion, however, Blind continues with the idea of a universal Deity as introduced to her by Mazzini. Furthermore, her description of the resurrection can also be seen as referring to Mazzini's idea on the 'evolution of society as an upwards movement'.⁶⁵ Blind describes the moment when Love rises from the dead as follows:

And beside me in the golden morning
 I beheld my shrouded phantom-guide;
 But no longer sorrow-veiled and mourning –
 It became transfigured by my side.
 And I knew – as one escaped from prison
 Sees old things again with fresh surprise –
 It was Love himself, Love re-arisen
 With the Eternal shining through his eyes
 ('The Leading of Sorrow', ll. 448-455 p. 110)⁶⁶

The two quoted passages frame the poem's main spiritual element and allow it to be read as presenting a deity which binds the human element with nature and which, by surviving, gives hope for the revival of a certain moral code. This is the result of Mazzini's arguments for the necessity of spirituality. Furthermore, the image of Love can be interpreted as a source for hope for 'the good, the true, the beautiful', something which, as can be seen from von Meysenbug's *Individualitäten*, is present in Mazzini's concept of a God.⁶⁷

Mazzini's ideas on spirituality and the mission of the individual and duty are also present in other parts of the volume, such as the two concluding stanzas of the first poem

⁶⁵ Blind, 'Recollections', 703.

⁶⁶ Also see the section on Shelley p. 80 and the section on Darwin for additional discussion on resurrection.

⁶⁷ One has to note here that Blind's use of Christian elements would allow her readers to recognise arguments and themes present in the poem.

from the cycle in 'PoA', 'The Sower', which in contrast to the main body of the poem speaks of more metaphysical subjects:

Oh, poles of birth and death! Controlling Powers
Of human toil and need!

On this fair earth all men are surely sowers,
Surely all life is seed!

All life is seed, dropped in Time's yawning furrow,
Which with slow sprout and shoot,
In the revolving world's unfathomed morrow,
Will blossom and bear fruit

('The Sower', ll. 29-36)

These lines can be read as alluding to Psalm 103, for example, verse 15: '*As for man, his days are grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourishes*' or to the parable of the Sower, which might suggest that Blind is revising and updating the Bible.⁶⁸ However, it is likely that these lines are also influenced by Mazzini's understanding of life as 'a mission: nothing else', where every person performs 'a function, and individualised mission' that is connected to a metaphysical element: 'call it God or what you like, there is life which we have not created, but which is given'.⁶⁹ The idea of the mission can be observed in ll. 31-2, where all men, as sowers, can be interpreted as having an individual function/mission connected to growth and progress in the future, as depicted in ll. 34-6. The latter also bears Mazzini's stamp, since blossoming and bearing fruit can be seen as a positive direction of development, especially if connected to the general agricultural setting of the poem. Furthermore, the description of 'life and death' as 'Controlling Powers' (l. 29) suggests that Blind is incorporating the same idea of the supreme powers

⁶⁸ *Bible*, Psalm 103:15.

For the connection to the parable of the Sower see the following page.

⁶⁹ Blind, 'Recollections', 710; also see note 64 above.

that can be seen in the title poem, but here, unlike 'AoM', the beings are not connected to a religious element but to the circular motion of life and history.⁷⁰

Speaking of this poem one has to bear in mind that the motifs of the sower and sowing is present in the literature from ancient times, for instance one can see a reference to it in Plato's *Phaedrus* where the process of sowing is used to describe the distribution of knowledge (276b-77a). The image of the sower was also popular with the Romantic poets and not only with the British ones. Thus, the German poet Novalis's epigraph to his poetic manifesto *Blütenstaub* (1798) also uses the motif of sowing as an analogy for spreading ideas; another example can be found amongst the works of Alexander Pushkin whose 1823 poem 'Behold a Sower' is based around the Biblical parable of the sower (Matthew 13:1-23; Luke 8:1-15; Mark 4:1-20) which allegorically speaks of the word of Jesus reaching potential followers, with the latter symbolised by four different types of soil.⁷¹ The Bible contains another verse that is also connected to the above: Galatians 6:7: 'God is not mocked for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap'. Relating this to Blind's poem, one can see that both, the parable and the verse from Galatians, where not only the ideas but also the deeds are sown, the latter being consistent with Mazzini's idea of perfectibility.⁷² What is more, one has to consider the fact that the poem opens a section of the volume arranged according to the agricultural cycle: from sowing to growing to reaping/gathering and to the period of rest. Hence, the images of sowing, seed

⁷⁰Also see the passage from Meysenbug's *Individualitäten*, where she described Mazzini's perception of history mentioned earlier in this chapter.

⁷¹ The title of Pushkin's poem differed across the existing English translations; it also appears as 'The Sower' or 'Behold a Sower Went Forth to Sow' amongst other variations. In Russian the title of the poem is taken from its first line: 'Свободы сеятель пустынный'.

⁷² Even if the scope of the chapter does not permit a lengthy discussion on the figure of the sower one has to mention that the image is popular in literature where it is used by such authors as John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886) and Gerard Manley Hopkins's poem 'New Readings'. Furthermore, some of the Pre-Raphaelites such as Ford Madox Brown and John Everett Millais have used the image in their works, *The Sower* (1868) and *The Parable of the Sower* (1863) respectively.

and sower can be read alongside the themes connected to either the fertility of the earth or of the ideas.

It is fitting to conclude this section by mentioning two more points: the lasting effect of Mazzini's influence and some consideration of Blind's 'Recollections of Mazzini'. The first point is demonstrated best by consulting George Eliot's biography, written by Blind. There she not only contextualises Eliot by reference to several eminent thinkers -- Comte, Mazzini and Darwin -- but also refers to Mazzini's opinions on one of Eliot's novels.⁷³ In Blind's discussion of Savonarola in the chapter on *Romola*,⁷⁴ she notes that Mazzini, whom she describes there as 'the greatest modern Italian', disagreed not only with Eliot's representation of this character but also with Savonarola's presence in the narrative. Blind also notes that 'he considered that it compared unfavourably with Adam Bede, a novel he genuinely admired'.⁷⁵ This not only demonstrates that Blind discussed Eliot's work with Mazzini, but also shows that his opinion was valued highly enough for her to use to support her argument.

On reading Blind's 'Recollections of Mazzini' Richard Garnett, whose memoir of Blind describes Mazzini as her 'special hero' with a 'prodigious' influence on the then young poet, writes:

I read your article on Mazzini with great interest and pleasure, quite equal with which I heard you read it aloud. In these days when there is so much sordid, or at least merely

⁷³ Blind, George Eliot, pp. 7-8.

Also, one has to note that the phrase 'a little toryism on the sly' is taken from Eliot's 'The Sad Fortunes of Reverend Amos Barton' from *The Scenes of Clerical Life*. One can read this as Blind perceiving Eliot as turning to the past: "imagination does a little Toryism by the sly, revelling in regret that dear, old, brown, crumbling, picturesque inefficiency is everywhere giving place to spick-and-span new-painted, new-varnished efficiency".

⁷⁴ The fact that Blind mentions Mazzini's opinions on the historical character suggests that Eliot was one of the writers she discussed with Mazzini.

⁷⁵ Blind, George Eliot, p. 150.

materialistic ... it is truly refreshing to be born [sic] ... with such a thoroughly pure & noble spirit as Mazzini's.⁷⁶

As the article itself indicates, Mazzini was the person to whom Blind turned for aid in making sense of the world: 'it seemed to me ... that I might get some clue to the meaning of the world, some help in my vain thinking after truth, from the one who in his own person seemed a guarantee of the sacredness of life'.⁷⁷ His influence endured throughout her life, and informed the overall plan and intellectual trajectory of *AoM*.

1.2 Percy Bysshe Shelley: 'Our Beloved Poet' and Blind's Poetic Role Model

Of all the poets who could have become a role model for Blind, Percy Bysshe Shelley stands out as the author and thinker who had the most profound personal and professional effect on her. In *Flight of the Skylark. The Development of Shelley's Reputation* Sylva Norman describes Blind as "[a] wild Shelley enthusiast" with a Teutonic accent.⁷⁸ Although this may be quite an accurate depiction of Blind's attitude to the poet, Norman's book neglects to convey the extent of Blind's contribution to the rebuilding of Shelley's reputation or to discuss his effect on her poetry. It is especially telling that Norman does not mention that Blind was a poet and literary critic in her own right; the only work by Blind referred to in the text is the edition of Shelley's poetry she prepared for Tauchnitz, a prominent German publisher.⁷⁹ Even if this can be explained by the fact that the author includes only such information as is pertinent to the discussion,

⁷⁶ Garnett, 'Memoir', pp. 11, 15; Add Ms 61929, f. 61b.

⁷⁷ Blind, 'Recollections', 703.

⁷⁸ Sylva Norman, *Flight of the Skylark. The Development of Shelley's Reputation* (London: Max Reinhard, 1954), p. 223.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 234. Norman describes this publication as an 'act of adoration' and as 'a Shelleyan landmark'. See pp. 106-7 for more information on this publication.

it is likely, especially considering the time when the book was published, that she was not familiar with Blind's poetry or, if she did know of it, did not hold it in high regard. Another mid twentieth-century work that addresses Shelley's influence on a plethora of Victorian writers, Roland A. Duersken's *Shelleyan Ideas in Victorian Literature*, completely omits Blind from its discussion of Shelley's effect on late nineteenth-century poets. The absence of her name as well as failure to mention her contribution to the recovery of Shelley's reputation, including her being one of the founding members of the Shelley Society, is yet another indication of the marginalisation of women poets and critics from the history of nineteenth-century literature.

Regarding publications closer to the present day, we can single out two works that, to a degree, address Blind's interest in Shelley's work. The first one is an unpublished PhD thesis that speaks of Shelley's impact on Blind's work: Adam Coccaro's *Evolution and Secular Teleology in the Progressive Epics of Percy Bysshe Shelley, Mathilde Blind, and Thomas Hardy* (2010). In the fourth chapter of the thesis, 'Mathilde Blind and the Ascendancy of Altruism: The Monist Telos of Caritas', Coccaro presents several points that are pertinent to this section. On the whole his discussion of Blind and Shelley gives us a general impression that Blind attempted to "update" Shelley's ideas with contemporary scientific tendencies. Comparing their philosophies, Coccaro observes that hers presents 'a more sophisticated, more fully worked out, and more ambitious synthesis' than Shelley's.⁸⁰ He notes that Blind develops Shelley's ideas not only through combining them with Darwin's theories, 'but this synthetic impulse can also be seen in

⁸⁰ Adam Coccaro, *Evolution and Secular Teleology in the Progressive Epics of Percy Bysshe Shelley, Mathilde Blind, and Thomas Hardy*, Unpublished PhD thesis, New York University, 2010, p. 191.

her use of Christianity, in her secular *caritas*, and in her attempt to unify natural and human history'.⁸¹

Expounding Blind's relationship with Shelley's philosophy, Coccaro remarks that both poets were interested in geology, especially in gradualism, which he sees as one of the central ideas in both of their works.⁸² Coccaro's discussion of the poets also presents one with some of the differences between their philosophies such as Blind's rejection of 'Shelley's sense of corruption in favor of an inherent violence that runs through and weds both natural and human history' allowing her to preserve 'her monism.'⁸³ However, what is absent in Coccaro's work is a detailed exploration of Blind's work on Shelley; he mentions only two of Blind's writings on Shelley: her 1886 lecture and the preface to the Tauchnitz edition to Shelley. What is more, Coccaro does not explore how any of these writings have affected the perception of Blind as a devout Shelley enthusiast and how this resonated with her own work, especially as some of Blind's contemporaries thought that she attempted to write poetry in Shelley's style.⁸⁴ Tracing and knowing these elements is essential for understanding the connection between the poets.

The second work that touches upon Blind's interest in Shelley is James Diedrick's *Mathilde Blind. Late Victorian Culture and the Woman of Letters* (2016). It includes several biographical and contextual observations helpful for understanding Blind's place

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 191.

As 'caritas' Coccaro understands 'the selfless love of others often found in charity ... [and through] an association with God's love for all His creatures, carries the connotation of a larger system of love that sees all of the world as one interrelated being. Moreover, the term is in keeping with the Shelley's project of rewriting Christian concepts into a more embracing system.' See *ibid.*, p. 27, n. 4. Thus in relation to Blind 'secular caritas' refers to a 'larger system of love' that unites the world, an element that is easily traceable in 'AoM'.

⁸² Ibid., p. 200, p. 202.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 198.

Coccaro does not provide us with an account of his understanding of monism, but from the thesis we can infer that it refers to the idea that only one supreme being exists and 'that the universe consists in not a plurality of substances but in a single substance.' (Gregory Claeys, ed., *Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-Century Thought* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), p. 259). As in note 78 this is a possible interpretation for the figure of Love in 'AoM'.

⁸⁴ See pp. 103-4 for an example.

amongst Shelley enthusiasts of the time and it contains a number of observations of Blind's infatuation with Shelley.⁸⁵ A part of the material presented in this book removed the need for a more detailed account of the Blind-Shelley context, but, as stated in the introduction to the thesis the focus of Diedrick's work substantially differs from the one of this thesis.

However, for the purpose of this work it is still useful to preface the discussion of his effect on *AoM* with an overview of Blind's interest in and engagement with Shelley's life and work. Particularly telling of her obsession with the poet is an event that happened at a gathering at Ford Madox Brown's in 1872 where a fragment of Shelley's skull was presented; on encountering it Blind, 'changed countenance in a moment: her eyes suffused, and she put the fragment fervently to her lips'.⁸⁶ What is more, the manuscript fragment at the BL also demonstrates Blind's strong interest in Shelley as she thought it important to make her protagonist, Alma, lose interest in a girl she admired for 'preferring Tupper to the divine Shelley [emphasis mine]' or to discard an admirer as his lines 'were not up to the stamp of Shelley and left me [Alma] cold'.⁸⁷ It is likely that Blind would have encountered Shelley's poetry first either through her family connections, while they still lived in Germany, or through the circle of German emigrants in London, many of whom read Shelley and engaged with his works in a variety of ways. The presumption is partially based on Shelley's reputation in Germany during the ten years preceding Blind's

⁸⁵ See chapter three in Diedrick's *Mathilde Blind*.

⁸⁶ William Michael Rossetti, *The Diary of William Michael Rossetti*, ed. Odette Bornand (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), p. 171.

Add Ms 61930, f. 8. and f. 34.

Martin Farquhar Tupper, (1810–1889), poet and writer. His collection of aphorisms on various subjects *Proverbial Philosophy: a Book of Thoughts and Arguments* (1838) was popular 'until the early 1860s' when it became 'remorselessly parodied and his name became a byword for banality'. (Robert Dingley, 'Tupper, Martin Farquhar', *Oxford DNB*, accessed on 25/05/2016). It is likely that Alma's reaction to Amy liking Tupper takes root in this attitude.

birth (1830s) as well as during her first decade (1840s). Thus, Susanne Schmid in her study of Shelley's reception in Germany notes that after Shelley's death in 1822:

German interest in Shelley, which followed in the wake of Byron fever, soon manifested in numerous biographical sketches, translations, and imitations ... Shelley has been read as the innocent martyr of circumstance, the unworldly arbiter of the aesthetic, the rebellious harbinger of revolution.⁸⁸

This preoccupation with Shelley, Schmid continues, resulted in 'reinventing manifold Shelleys' who left their traces in a variety of printed sources.⁸⁹ Ferdinand Freiligrath, for example, included a number of Shelley's poems in *Rose, Thistle and Shamrock* (1853), an anthology of British poetry which he edited.⁹⁰ Among the poems included in the volume, one can name 'To the Assertors of Liberty', a passage from 'Hellas', 'Love's Philosophy', 'The Cloud' and 'To a Skylark'. Furthermore, his daughter and Blind's childhood friend, Kate, translated some of Shelley's poems into German. Another example of a person of German origin belonging to roughly the same circle as the Blinds who engaged with Shelley's poetry was Friedrich Engels, who attempted to produce a translated edition of Shelley's poetry in 1839 but failed to find a publisher.⁹¹ All of this suggests that at the time Shelley's reputation in Germany was on the rise.

In addition to the above it is important to note how Shelley was viewed in Britain at the time. As Timothy Webb puts it, 'one either had to be violently for Shelley or violently against him.'⁹² Similar observations of the divided opinions on Shelley can be seen in the more recent works that touch on the history of Shelley's reception. For

⁸⁸ Susanne Schmid, *Shelley's German Afterlives: 1814-2000* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 1.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁹⁰ Ferdinand Freiligrath (1810-1876), German poet and translator (<http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/autor/ferdinand-freiligrath-180>, accessed on 01/06/2016).

⁹¹ Ashton, p. 36, p. 92; Schmid, p. 28.

⁹² Timothy Webb, *Shelley: A Voice not Understood* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977), p. 4.

example, according to Richard Cronin, '[b]y the time that he died Shelley was well known, his poems were not', which resulted in the fact 'that throughout the century the afterlives of Shelley and of his poetry followed markedly divergent courses.'⁹³ He remarks that such an attitude is present in Arnold's and Robert Browning's essays on Shelley and, in addition to that, 'Shelley's poems left their mark on the poems of his successors. Shelley the man ... provided material for the century's novelists.'⁹⁴ Cronin's essay also indicates that Shelley was the precursor poet for a number of Victorian authors, one example being Swinburne.⁹⁵ Other scholars, such as Jane Stabler also note the duality of Shelley's image in the nineteenth century; the aspect singled out in her essay is the 'polariz[ation] between views of his work as otherworldly and all too earthly,' a facet that, as one can see from the rest of the essay, was also transferred to the perception of Shelley's personality.⁹⁶

The dichotomy recorded by Webb, Cronin and Stabler warrants a deeper investigation into Blind's opinions of the poet and how or if they changed throughout her working life, which will allow us to develop a better understanding of how Shelley's poetry affected *AoM*. Blind's first well known work on the poet, a lecture simply entitled 'Shelley', was originally delivered to The Church of Progress on the 9th of January 1870.⁹⁷ This lecture is particularly important because, as will be demonstrated in the

⁹³ Richard Cronin, 'Shelley and the Nineteenth Century', in *The Oxford Handbook of Percy Bysshe Shelley* ed. By Michael O'Neill, Michael, Tony Howe and Madeleine Callaghan (eds.) (Oxford: OUP, 2013), pp. 611-626, p. 611.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 612.

⁹⁵ See *ibid.*, p. 616.

⁹⁶ Jane Stabler 'Shelley Criticism from Romanticism to Modernism,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, pp. 658-672, p. 658.

⁹⁷ Mathilde Blind, 'Shelley. A Lecture Delivered to the Church of Progress, in St Georges Hall, Langham Place, W., on Sunday Evening, January 9th, 1870'. Privately printed by Taylor and Co., 1870.

St. George's Hall, according to *Dickens' Dictionary of London* was built in and could accommodate between 800 and 900 persons., Charles Dickens, *Dickens's Dictionary of London, 1882 (fourth Year): an Unconventional Handbook* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1882), p. 228.

There are several mentions of a 'Church of Progress' in the literature of the period; however, most of them do not present extensive information on the organisation. For instance, one is recorded as a certified place for religious progress in *The Englishman's Brief On Behalf of His National Church*, but there are no further details (Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (Great Britain), Tract Committee, *The Englishman's Brief On Behalf of His National*

course of this section, it already anticipates several thematic parallels between ‘AoM’ and Shelley’s work suggesting that the seeds for the poem could have been sown long before she started composing it. What is more, this lecture was pivotal for Blind’s reputation as a capable scholar of Shelley’s work, gaining for her ‘the acquaintance of Dr. John Chapman, editor of the Westminster Review, who in the following July inserted an article on Shelley from her pen.’⁹⁸

The lecture presents us with several valuable elements, the first of which is Blind’s brief introduction to Shelley’s life. There is a reluctance to address the controversies surrounding Shelley’s treatment of his first wife in her suggestion that his first marriage, ‘proving very uncongenial to both, was dissolved after a few years’.⁹⁹ Diedrick suggests that Blind was aware of the details of this controversy, basing his argument on the way Blind describes the relationship in the introduction to the Tauchnitz edition of Shelley, where she mentions Shelley’s opposition to marriage, as outlined in the introduction to ‘Queen Mab’, and suggests there is no positive evidence that Harriet was willing to agree to a separation.¹⁰⁰ Diedrick’s reading of Blind’s comments on the end of Harriet’s relationship suggests the likelihood that Blind was aware of Shelley’s contribution to Harriet’s suicide.¹⁰¹ All of this leads us to the conclusion that Blind was aware of the less than amicable parting and its consequences. However, as this section will demonstrate

Church, (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1880), New, rev., and enl. ed., p. 198). Another mention can be found in where a church of the same name is mentioned as being set up in Bristol in 1869 by Baxter Langley. (George R., Sims, 1847-1922. *Among My Autographs* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1904.), p. 110). However, an article in *The Sydney Morning Herald* from 11 June 1870 provides a considerable information on this Church, even if its author is antagonistic to the organisation. Thus the article states that The Church of Progress is ‘[t]he successor to the St Martin’s Hall “Sunday Evenings”’ and it provides the following extract from a handbill ‘There are great number in London who have no sympathy with the religions of so called orthodox Churches, and who would be glad to see an impetus given to rationalism, and a more truly liberal, free, and catholic spirit breathed into the community. The Church of Progress makes this its direct mission. It desires to separate religion from superstition; and while it inculcates the lessons of morality and the love of knowledge, to elevate the minds of the people above useless forms and baneful creeds.’ (p. 7) Accessed through <http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/13206799> on 15 June 2016.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁹⁹ Blind, ‘Shelley. A Lecture’, p. 2.

¹⁰⁰ See pp. 106-7, for more information on the Tauchnitz edition.

¹⁰¹ See Diedrick, *Blind*, loc. 2446.

later on there are several problems with taking the Tauchnitz introduction as evidence of this.

Speaking of Blind's awareness of Harriet's treatment by Shelley, there is information that potentially suggests that Blind knew about it through Garnett even before the Tauchnitz edition was published. Norman observes that in 1862 Garnett, who was at the time connected to the Percy Florence Shelley's wife's attempts to preserve the poet's reputation, published *Relics of Shelley* which contains what Norman describes as 'a piece of rank dishonesty'.¹⁰² This act consisted of making it appear that the negative comments originally directed at Harriet's sister, Eliza, appear as written about Harriet. Norman excuses Garnett by saying that 'he was young, he was a little overawed by his position as spokesman for the Boscombe family'.¹⁰³ It is worth noting that Garnett's interest in Shelley did not diminish with time, even with information on Harriet's treatment by Shelley becoming available. This permanence of opinion presents us with two possibilities; the first option is that Garnett was able to ignore Shelley's personal life for the sake of his poetry or ideas. The second explanation can be connected to Garnett's and, possibly, Blind's continued effort to improve Shelley's reputation could be explained through another observation made by Norman:

[i]f we look closely on the staunch adherents in the later nineteenth century, an uneasy suspicion creeps in that those who stuck to Shelley did so in the way of business, because editing and probing and biographizing of a chosen poet could set a man up with a title to distinction and transform a miscellaneous journalist into an authority.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Norman, p. 211. According to Ronald Duersken, Robert Browning was shown letters 'by the bookseller Thomas Hookham of Shelley's conduct toward Harriet' in 1858, which makes this another point that supports that Blind would have known about the problematic separation. See: Ronald A. Duersken, *Shelleyan Ideas in Victorian Literature* (The Hague: Mouton, 1966), p. 57.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 211.

¹⁰⁴ Norman, p. 202.

Even if this might be one of the reasons Blind continuously defended Shelley, it is more likely that it was the intellectual and cultural value of his works that attracted her the most to Shelley's poetry, which can be seen in her statement that there is no other poet who is 'more fitted ... [to] quicken the thoughts, and purify the hearts of a people'.¹⁰⁵

In the remaining pages of the lecture Blind focuses on a number of poems that she regards as being the most characteristic of Shelley such as 'Prometheus Unbound', 'Song to the Men of England' (quoted in full, but not named), 'Ode to Liberty', 'Hellas', 'The Witch of Atlas', 'Rosalind and Helen', 'Julian and Maddalo', 'Epipsychidion' and 'Adonais'. The majority of the attention in the lecture is paid, by far, to 'Prometheus Unbound'; Blind provides a synopsis of the poem giving particular attention to the characters of Jupiter and Prometheus. Jupiter for Blind is a 'superstition, which possessed ... hurried men and women to throw themselves under the wheels of the car of Juggernaut', a 'superstition' that made mothers sacrifice their children and a driving force behind the actions of institutions such as the Inquisition.¹⁰⁶ It is worth noting that the imagery used to describe Jupiter is also used in the second part of 'AoM' where Blind describes the people being crushed under a 'Juggernaut idol of gold' ('Pilgrim Soul', p. 66, l. 39). It is likely that by using similar elements Blind aligns her vision of corrupting influences with Shelley's Jupiter, thus indicating that a proportion of the issues that the society faces are connected with superstitions and social conventions that developed spontaneously among human beings.

¹⁰⁵ Blind, 'Shelley. A Lecture', p. 1.

¹⁰⁶ Blind, 'Shelley. A Lecture', p. 4. The joyful songs that Blind speaks about are found in the fourth part of 'Prometheus Unbound'.

A further aspect that Blind singles out in her discussion of 'Prometheus Unbound' is the liberation of humanity, which also is one of the main motifs in the title poem of *AoM*:

[Through] the toil, suffering, and unceasing struggle of her sages and heroes, humanity is liberated from the galling yoke, and feels the spirit of a new life thrill through all its members, the earth, nay, the moon herself, are depicted as sympathising with the glad redemption, which, being echoed and re-echoed from planet to planet, such a chant is intoned as ear never heard before. To my mind this is the highest watermark which the tide of song has yet left upon the sands of time.¹⁰⁷

The last two stanzas of 'AoM' contain a passage with a similar tone, describing jubilation at the resurrection of Love. As the final stanza was quoted in the previous section (see p. 68), it will suffice to present here the penultimate stanza of the poem:

Ceased the Voice: and as it ceased it drifted
 Like the seashell's inarticulate moan;
 From the Deep, on wings of flame uplifted,
 Rose the sun rejoicing and alone.
 Laughed in light upon the living ocean,
 Danced and rocked itself upon the spray,
 And its shivered beams in twinkling motion
 Gleamed like star-motes of the Milky Way.
 ('The Leading of Sorrow', p.110, ll. 440-7)

The similarities between Blind's work and the points highlighted in her discussion of 'Prometheus Unbound' are noticeable not only in the great happiness expressed at the resurrection/liberation of a significant figure of the poem, but also in the imagery used by both authors. Like Shelley, Blind draws on the imagery of the celestial bodies in her depiction of the resurrection. Her version, however, does not give them voices or separately name multiple planets, making the Sun and the Milky Way the only witnesses to the event. Blind's singling out of the Sun is connected to the overarching narrative of

¹⁰⁷ Blind, *Shelley. A Lecture*, p. 4.

her poem because one of the most commonly used meanings of a rising sun throughout centuries and cultures is related to death and rebirth. However, knowing that she was to read about astronomy according to Mazzini's study programme, it is possible that by mentioning the Milky Way she hints at a larger body of celestial witnesses to the resurrection than in Shelley's poem.¹⁰⁸

Speaking of the parallels between the two poems, we need to mention that both texts feature a Christ-like figure. Several scholars have compared the figure of Prometheus to Christ as can be seen, for example, in Madeleine Callaghan's 'Shelley and Milton' where the similarities include, among others, 'reform zeal' and bearing.¹⁰⁹ As mentioned earlier, the figure of Love, featured in Blind's work, also presents some parallels to Christ and in this regard it is worth mentioning an observation made by Leigh Hunt in his review of 'The Revolt of Islam':

Mr. Shelley is of opinion with many others that the world is a very beautiful one externally, but wants a good deal of mending with respect to its mind and habits; and for this purpose he would quash as many cold and selfish passions as possible, and rouse up the general element of Love, till it set our earth rolling more harmoniously.¹¹⁰

Later on in the same paragraph, elaborating this idea, Hunt notes that 'Jesus Christ himself recommended Love as the great law that was to supersede others.'¹¹¹

The material above demonstrates that some of the ideas and images present in 'AoM' were already in existence in Blind's consciousness as early as 1870. In the article Blind gives a critical account of William Michael Rossetti's *The Poetical Works of Percy*

¹⁰⁸ According to a variety of sources Milky Way was already known of at the time.

¹⁰⁹ Madeleine Callaghan, 'Milton and Shelley' in *The Oxford Handbook of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Michael O'Neill, Tony Howe, and Madeleine Callaghan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 478-494, p. 487.

¹¹⁰ Leigh Hunt, 'Revolt of Islam' in *Percy Bysshe Shelley: The Critical Heritage*, ed. James E. Barcus (London: Routledge, 1975), pp. 106-14, p. 111.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

Bysshe Shelley and in addition to containing a number of remarks on Rossetti's treatment of the text it also includes Blind's opinions on Shelley and his work.¹¹² Blind opens with a literature review describing the existing works on Shelley as 'fragmentary' at best and emphasising that Rossetti's book is different from the others as it is the first one that combines 'scattered materials ... into a symmetrical whole'.¹¹³ However, a considerable portion of Blind's essay is devoted to Rossetti's textual emendations by which she is not persuaded, such as the altered punctuation that resulted in a substantive appearing as a verb, with which Blind did not agree.¹¹⁴ Such attention to detail shows an extensive knowledge of Shelley's life and work demonstrates that Blind aims to establish herself not only as an avid admirer of his talent but also as a scholar of his work who is expected to be taken seriously. In relation to the essay being a record of Blind's opinions on Shelley, it reveals her partiality to the introduction to 'The Triumph of Life', which she describes as 'one of the most highly wrought and perfect passages we know in poetry'.¹¹⁵ Of the shorter lyrics Blind singles out 'Ode to the West Wind', 'Ozymandias' and 'Skylark' with the first one being the 'finest poem the lyric muse of England ever produced'.¹¹⁶

The commentary on Rossetti's treatment of material and opinions on Shelley's work were crucial in the creation of Blind's reputation as a devout Shelleyist and a skilled literary critic. Indeed, Blind's *Westminster* article was praised as one of the best studies of Shelley's work by Theodore Watts: 'Now, in the matter Shelleyan, we have the greatest respect for the opinion of Mathilde Blind: her article in the Westminster is one of the best

¹¹² William M. Rossetti, *The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley. A Revised Text, with Notes and a Memoir* (London: Moxon and Co., 1870).

¹¹³ Blind, 'Shelley. A Review of *The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, edited by William Michael Rossetti', *Westminster Review*, 38 (1870), 75-97, 77.

¹¹⁴ See Blind the above p. 80 for an example.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 82.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 97.

studies on Shelley we have.’¹¹⁷ However, the same article contained a not so thinly veiled slight on Blind’s poetry -- ‘she fails when she tries to compete with Shelley in writing Shelley poetry’ -- as well as a criticism of her treatment of Shelley’s poetry: ‘now, one of our truest and most delicate Shelleyan critics, Miss Mathilde Blind, did not like the word "cast", in the fourth line and substitutes the word "past:" and immediately the line became, of course, hers and not Shelley’s.’¹¹⁸ It is worth noting that Blind criticized the same treatment of the poems in Rossetti’s edition of Shelley, making it surprising that she committed the same offence.

Her standing as a well-known Shelley scholar can also be observed from the misattributions such as the one made by *The Manchester Guardian* from 27 January 1883. This assumes that Blind was the author of an article on Shelley published earlier that month in the *Westminster Review*, saying that ‘good Shelleyists will remember an admirable article on the poet from her pen’.¹¹⁹ The article in question, ‘Shelley: His Friends and Critics’, was in fact written, according to the Wellesley index, by Wathen Mark Wilks Call (1817-1890).¹²⁰ The part that convinced *The Manchester Guardian* that the article might have been written by Blind was the review of *Records of Shelley Byron and the Author* (1878) by Trelawney, where Call quotes passages from his letters and shows a certain degree of familiarity with Shelley’s life.

Blind’s career as a literary critic continued in *The Athenaeum* where she contributed a number of articles on various volumes including William Morris’ *Love is*

¹¹⁷ Theodore Watts, ‘Shelley’s Poetical Works ed. H. B. Forman’, *The Athenaeum*, 29 September 1877, 396-400, 399.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 399. The change that Watt’s refers to is to a line from the ‘Revolt of Islam’ ‘The darkness of brief frenzy cast on me’, Canto III, l. 130.

¹¹⁹ Anon., ‘The Quarterlies’, *The Manchester Guardian* January 27, 1883 p. 9.

¹²⁰ Wathen Mark Wills Call, ‘Shelley: His Friends and Critics’ *The Westminster Review* 01/01/1883, 1-54.

E. J. Trelawney *Records of Shelley Byron and the Author*, 1878. Another work covered by this essay is *Aspects of Poetry; being Lectures delivered at Oxford* by John Campbell Shairp (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1881).

Enough; or, The Freeing of Pharamond: a Morality (23 November 1872), Thomas Woolner's *Silenus* (9 August 1884) and *Pygmalion* (24 December 1881). Amongst these Blind reviewed several books connected to Shelley's life; the complete list is made up of five articles with only the first one being signed, all of which were identified by consulting the marked copy of *The Athenaeum* at City University in London:

- 'Mr Hotten's Shelley', 27 January 1872, 114-115;
- 'Shelley's Early Life, from Original Sources by Dennis Florence Mac-Carty [sic]', 9 November 1872, 592-593;
- 'The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley', 31 January 1874, 154-55;
- 'Shelley: A Critical Biography by George Barrett Smith', 17 November 1877, 621-22;
- 'Our Library table' (the first paragraph, which is concerned with a publication by the Shelley Society), 9 April 1887, 477.¹²¹

These reviews themselves do not contain sufficient information on Blind's attitude to Shelley's poetry to explore each of them in detail, but they present several points that are beneficial for the general context of Blind's involvement with Shelley.

All of these articles applaud the growing attention to Shelley and his work, a cause that Blind was passionate about; however, they also observe that most of the new studies present an incomplete, and sometimes incorrect, account of his life. For example, the second review on the list acknowledges MacCarthy's contribution to Shelley scholarship as his work includes several previously unpublished letters; however, in it Blind primarily focuses on disproving suggestions about Shelley's time in Ireland. Blind's judgement of the book is best seen in her comparison of MacCarthy to an astronomer who thought that he had found a monster on the sun; it turns out that the monster is a fly walking on the

¹²¹ After this review further publications on Shelley's works were given to Watts or William Rossetti, among others. The existence of these articles was first identified by the contributors to *Athenaeum Index of Reviews and Reviewers*; the first part of which covering the years between 1828 and 1827 is held at the City University London, second part, years 1872-1900, is held at the University of Gent.

lens of his telescope, but at least the ‘fly was a tangible fact’.¹²² Likewise, her review of *Shelley’s Poetical Works* from 31 January 1874 commends the arrival of a new edition since it suggests increased interest in Shelley’s work. Having said that, she reprimands the editor for ‘an obvious effort to allure the public by speculating on a certain curiosity, extraneous to the subject, which cannot fail to be repugnant to lovers of Shelley’, likely referring to the writer’s attitude to the relationship between Shelley’s ‘Laon and Cythna’ and ‘The Revolt of Islam’.¹²³ The last review mentioned on the list continues the trend: Blind sees the volume as being ‘aimed at popularising a subject that for long was not only far removed from the sympathies of the British public, but generally regarded with suspicion and dislike.’¹²⁴ This information demonstrates that through the period of fifteen years when these articles were published Blind’s interest in Shelley stayed reasonably constant as did her desire to popularise his work.

Apart from reviewing the works on Shelley produced by others, Blind also contributed to the list: her edition of Shelley’s poems was published as a part of the ‘Collection of British Authors’ series (vol. 1207) by the prominent Leipzig publisher Bernhard Tauchnitz. Speaking about this particular volume one needs to bear in mind Tauchnitz’s editorial policy, which was that he ‘only reprinted books that were safe in two ways: uncontroversial and marketable, like Blind’s edition, which was among the forerunners of the Shelley revival’.¹²⁵ Tauchnitz’s policy allows us to surmise that Shelley was not a controversial author in Germany at the time, which corresponds to Schmid’s observation that he was often seen as a ‘sensitive poet of love and nature.’¹²⁶

¹²² Blind, ‘Shelley: A Critical Biography by George Barrett Smith’, *The Athenaeum*, November 17, 1877, 621.

¹²³ Blind, ‘The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley’, *The Athenaeum*, January 31 1874, 154-5, 154.

¹²⁴ Blind, ‘Shelley: A Critical Biography by George Barrett Smith’, 621.

¹²⁵ Schmid, p. 28.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

Furthermore, Tauchnitz's editorial policies suggest that the way Blind presents Shelley in the introduction as well as the selection of poems might have been affected by these guidelines and thus is not completely representative of her own opinion on the poet, a point that most of the scholars who have explored Blind's memoir of Shelley do not make. The editorial policy is the most likely reason why Blind's portrayal of Shelley stresses that he was a gentle and sensitive soul, who, at least during his stay at university, was 'marked ... by the singular purity of his morals, the gentleness of his manners, and an abstemiousness in diet that verged on the ascetic'.¹²⁷ It is also highly probable that Blind's depiction of the end of Shelley's and Harriet's relationship as amicable and the suggestion that Harriet's suicide 'had no direct connection with any act of Shelley's' has the same origin.¹²⁸ For this reason, we might legitimately express some scepticism about the verdict of critics like Stabler, who argues that Blind's introduction to the Tauchnitz edition 'was the apotheosis of biographical idealism'.¹²⁹

In 1886, the same year in which Edward Dowden's biography of the poet was published, Blind's lecture entitled *Shelley's View of Nature Contrasted with Darwin's* was delivered and published.¹³⁰ The lecture in question was presented just a couple of years prior to the publication of *AoM*, and definitely within the timeline of the volume's composition, as will be demonstrated in the course of the next chapter.¹³¹ As the lecture mostly deals with the representation of nature in poetry, Darwin and evolution, a considerable part of it will be discussed in the next section apart from several Shelley-related opinions that are relevant to this chapter. This lecture differs from the earlier ones

¹²⁷ Mathilde Blind, 'Memoir', *A Selection from the Poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (B. Tauchnitz: Leipzig, 1872), p. xi.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. xviii.

¹²⁹ Stabler, p. 666.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 666-7.

¹³¹ See chapter 2 section 1.

in being less “obsessed” with Shelley and even pointing out some shortcomings of her beloved poet, something that none of Blind’s earlier publications on the poet do. One of the most important moments in this respect is Blind’s conviction that Shelley’s poetry would have been transformed if he had lived long enough to learn of Darwin’s theories. This observation, even if it is far from a full-fledged critique of her favourite poet, indicates a change in Blind’s attitude: the ideas present in her idol’s work are no longer infallible.

Regarding Blind’s discussion of Shelley’s poems, of particular interest are her comments on ‘Prometheus Unbound’. Firstly, she argues that the battle between Good and Evil present in the poem is portrayed in a rather ‘crude and undigested manner’, which supports the conclusion that Blind was starting to distance herself from Shelley’s ideas.¹³² However, one of the key aspects in Blind’s discussion of the poem is concerned with the proclamation of Prometheus’s liberation, and, as seen earlier, there are parallels between Love’s resurrection and Prometheus regaining freedom. For Blind the raising of Prometheus from the dead results in the ‘ultimate triumph of the human mind over the forces of evil by which it is encompassed, and the consequent advent of a Golden Age, [which] has been mystically foreshadowed by all great religious and ethical teachers’.¹³³ Blind ascribes the ‘golden age’ idea to more than the battle between good and evil and connects it with Rousseau’s influence on young Shelley and argues that it is ‘the keynote of Shelley’s most important poems — of ‘The Revolt of Islam’, ‘Prometheus Unbound’

¹³² Blind, *Shelley’s View of Nature Contrasted with Darwin’s* (London: Printed by Richard Clay & Sons for private distribution, 1886), p. 18.

¹³³ Blind, ‘Shelley and Darwin’ p. 19.

of 'Hellas'' and can also be found in Shelley's other poems, such as 'The Ode to Liberty'.¹³⁴

Returning to the lecture there is another useful point that is present in the following passage:

Shelley was a philosophic poet, because he aimed at grasping the world as a whole, and at embodying sound ideas in his loftiest flights of imagination, that we must regret that his conception of Nature is rather the offspring of the eighteenth century than of the nineteenth. Two evils, or more properly speaking, one evil with two heads, like the Austrian eagle, is ever present to Shelley's mind—the double yoke of superstition and tyranny. Let but triumphant liberty abolish this, and it seems to him that all the rest must inevitably follow.¹³⁵

Here we can see the following two important elements. Firstly, it is connected to Blind's observation that Shelley intended to understand 'the world as a whole', an element that, as established in the previous section, attracted her to Mazzini's philosophy and is relevant for *AoM*.¹³⁶ The title poem alone is a reasonably successful attempt to incorporate such an approach to the history and possible future development of humankind.

We can also find traces of this world-comprehension mode in the second part of the volume. Even if it encompasses the world on a much smaller scale than 'AoM', it still provides a complete picture of an average year in the countryside, with most of the poems not having overt geographical markers. This universality of experience is precisely the key to seeing the wholeness of the world as it reflects experiences that everyone can

¹³⁴ One has to note that in light of Darwin's theories Blind disagreed with Rousseau's ideas on nature describing them as 'rose-coloured', *ibid.*, p. 12.

¹³⁵ Blind, 'Shelley and Darwin', p. 13.

¹³⁶ Another link with Mazzini can be seen in her description of Prometheus as one of the 'great men who ... have appeared in the world preaching tolerance and charity, the sanctity of wisdom and the beauty of truth' is similar to that of Mazzini that was quoted in the beginning of the previous chapter. Such similarities allow one to presume that Mazzini's influence seeped into Blind's perception of other people and literary characters she had encountered. This will also be evident from, for example, the chapter on George Eliot.

experience. Secondly, the extract provides additional support for the idea that Blind treated Shelley's poetry more critically here than in her previous publications, which is noticeable from the last sentence. There Blind suggests that Shelley saw liberty as a panacea for the two main problems, superstition and tyranny, and based on the tone of both the extract and lecture she sees it as a rather simplified approach to the world's problems. In this respect it would have been interesting to consult the lecture that Blind intended to present on Shelley's relationship with women as it might have contained a further re-evaluation of some of his biography and work; however, it was never delivered due to Blind's coming down with an illness.

Blind's works on Shelley presented above indicate that his importance for Blind decreased with time: the regard for Shelley's work and interest in promoting it stayed, but as her poetical skill developed it appears that Blind approached her idol more critically, a development which was quite common at the time and can be traced in Matthew Arnold's and Robert Browning's attitude to Shelley's work as described in a variety of sources on Shelley's legacy consulted in this section. Linking this back to the discussion of the poetic precursors in the introduction to this chapter, Blind's relationship with Shelley has some of the features of Bloom's concept of influence, which includes her change of attitude mentioned earlier. An important point here is that in Blind's case we are not dealing with a poetic foremother, which suggests that the gender of predecessor was less of importance for her than, for example, a subscription to a certain worldview or a particular quality of writing. In the case of Shelley, such an attitude also demands a certain level of blindness, at least publicly, to the elements that would potentially raise questions about her interest in the poet.

One of Blind's ways of interacting with the poet, through literary criticism as presented above, provides a succinct record of her changing attitudes to Shelley throughout her life. In regard to Shelley's effect on the poems included in *AoM*, some of the themes were explored earlier in this section; however, to fully demonstrate the connection between the poets' work we also need to present examples of thematic and textual connection. Of particular interest in this regard is what Chapman describes as the 'Shelleyan trope of the wind's revolutionary power.'¹³⁷ She turns to it in describing a poem, 'Fais ce que dois—advienne que pourra!', by Theodosia where Chapman connects the trope to '[a]n interplay between public and private, in the circulation of her identity as expatriate poetess.'¹³⁸ Whereas Blind's identity was not as split as Garrow-Trollope's because Blind considered herself as English, Blind's work provides evidence that she was subscribing to the wind as an agent of change, including revolutionary change.

Amongst the themes present in Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind' one can single out two that are also of importance for *AoM*: the relationship of man and nature and transformation. Blind uses these themes throughout the whole volume, however, there are several places where she also alludes to the poem and almost creates a dialogue between the two. One of the poems where it is particularly evident is 'The Sower', which opens 'PoA'. The parallels between 'The Sower' and 'Ode to the West Wind' are particularly noticeable when comparing the seventh stanza of Blind's poem:

The sower sows the seed, which mouldering,
 Deep confined in the earth,
 Is buried now, but with the future spring
 Will quicken into birth.
 ('The Sower', ll. 25-8)

¹³⁷ Chapman, *Networking*, p. 130.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

and the following excerpt from Shelley:

O thou
 Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed

 The winged seeds, where they lie cold and low,
 Each like a corpse within its grave, until
 Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow

 Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth, and fill
 (Driving sweet buds like flocks in air)
 with living hues and colours plain and hill.¹³⁹

In 'The Sower' Blind explores the period when nature is in a stage between death and rebirth in a way that resonates with Shelley's autumnal setting. Both poems address the possibility of reawakening through images of seeds buried deep in the earth waiting for Spring, as demonstrated by the extracts above. One of the possible readings as noted by James Chandler, is that Shelley's lines represent 'a miniature poem rendered in the familiar Christianized pastoral framework of the redemption of the soul after the death of the body.'¹⁴⁰ The same can be said of Blind's poem as she draws upon the Christian imagery to convey a similar message of resurrection and the hope connected to it. However, there is a marked difference between the two poems: Blind replaces the more natural way of dissemination of the seeds, wind, with human agency. This can be interpreted either as her alluding to the parable of the sower or, which is more likely bearing in mind the intellectual context of the volume and the last stanza of the poem, as Blind referring to humankind's impact on their evolution developed under the influence of Mazzini and Darwin.

¹³⁹ Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'Ode to the West Wind', ll. 5-12.

¹⁴⁰ James Chandler, 'History's Lyre: The West Wind' and the Poet's Work' in P. B. Shelley, Aondald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat (eds), *Shelley's Poetry and Prose* (London: W. W. Norot & Company, 2002), pp. 711-721, p. 712.

The same themes are also present in 'Wings', which forms a kind of bridge between the two parts of the volume. Of particular interest here is the second stanza of the poem:

Ascend, oh my Soul, on the wings of the wind as it blows,
 Striking wild organ-blasts from the forest trees,
 Or on the zephyr bear love of the rose to the rose,
 Or with the hurricane sower cast seed as he goes
 Limitless ploughing the leagues of the sibilant seas.
('Wings', ll. 6-10)

Here the protagonist invokes her soul to join the wind in its travels and works throughout the earth, with one of the activities the soul joins in being sowing. In contrast to 'The Sower', this poem joins nature and human beings together in the process of sowing, which foreshadows the travels of the soul in the rest of 'AoM'. Even if Blind uses similar wind-imagery she ascribes the role of the sower to a more violent wind: in Greek mythology the zephyr is connected to the west wind and represents a gentle wind that can blow during both spring and autumn. Blind's use of the hurricane in the process of sowing the seeds suggests that, at least in 'AoM' with its focus on the generalised human experience, the unrelenting force behind change, renewal and rebirth relates to the following lines in Shelley's poem 'Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere; / Destroyer and Preserver' as much as it incorporates the west wind as a symbol of revolution.¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ Shelley, 'Ode to the West Wind', ll. 13-4.

1.3. Evolution: The Ascent of Man, The Origin of Species

Blind's approach to nature and human history is not only defined by Mazzini and Shelley, but is also informed by current scientific theories, with Darwin's ideas taking a special place. Here it is important to keep in mind that, as Laura Otis notes, '[t]he notion of a "split" between literature and science, of a "gap" to be "bridged" between the two, was never a nineteenth-century phenomenon'.¹⁴² She continues by observing that 'in the popular press ... the two commingled and were accessible to all readers ... science was not perceived as being written in a "foreign language"'.¹⁴³ Indeed, nineteenth-century theories addressing the development of the earth, nature and humans, such as those formulated by Lyell, Wallace and Darwin, produced a considerable and wide-reaching effect on various areas of Victorian life. As G. M. Young put it, 'as early Victorian thought is regulated by the conception of progress, so the late Victorian mind is overshadowed by the doctrine of evolution'.¹⁴⁴ An example of how widespread the evolutionary theories were in late-nineteenth-century society is their presence in the popular culture of the time, such as in this joke published in 1894 in *Funny Folks*:

Chappieson (rather out of his depth): "Aw — talking of this ape forefather theory, Miss Pertleigh, would you—aw—call it the 'Descent' or the 'Ascent of Man?'"
Miss Pertleigh (significantly): "Well, really, Mr Chappieson, I think that it very much depends on the man".¹⁴⁵

Published under the title 'Darwinian', this scene illustrates a rather simplified understanding of Darwin's works. However, the joke can also be seen as addressing a

¹⁴² Laura Otis, 'Introduction', *Literature and Science in the Nineteenth Century. An Anthology*, ed. Laura Otis (Oxford: OUP, 2009), p. xvii. See third chapter for the discussion of the volume's reception.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

¹⁴⁴ G. M. Young, *Portrait of an Age* (London: Phoenix Press, 2002, 2nd ed.), p. 112.

¹⁴⁵ Anon. 'Darwinian', *Funny Folks*, 7 April 1894, p. 3.

concern that gained strength with the advance of the new century: the direction in which humankind was moving. It was already present in the 1880s when *AoM* was composed, as this decade was affected by an economic recession, which ‘meant that ideas of progress were increasingly countered by fears of cultural ... decline’.¹⁴⁶ In addition to the troubling state of the economy there was a number of other issues that heightened the feeling of the possible negative developmental direction at the end of the nineteenth century. Thus a substantial jump of technology and science that happened in the course of the century as well as the numerous movements that formed and/or became more prominent around the *fin de siècle*, such as aestheticism, decadence, the New Woman, or anarchism contributed to the growth of uncertainty in the period. As Elaine Showalter suggests,

[t]he crises of the fin de siècle ... are more intensely experienced, more emotionally fraught, more weighted with symbolic and historical meaning, because we invest them with the metaphors of death and rebirth that we project on the final decades and years of the century.¹⁴⁷

Blind’s *AoM* taps into this feeling of uncertainty through, for example, addressing the development of humanity as well as the ideas of progress/decline, questioning the direction of progress and debating the origin of life. These subjects are already overtly present in the title of the volume and the poem, which can be perceived as a play on Charles Darwin’s *The Descent of Man*. On carefully studying the volume, it reveals a plethora of references to Darwin’s theories that manifest themselves in Blind’s approach to the questions of creation, development and survival in both the human and natural world.

¹⁴⁶ Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst, ‘Degeneration’, *The Fin de Siècle. A Reader in Cultural History, c.1880-1900* (Oxford, New York: OUP, 2000), p. 1.

¹⁴⁷ Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (London: Virago, 1992), p. 2.

Before exploring the existing work on Blind and evolutionary theories it is useful to consider the fact that the volume and the longest poem in it share a name; what is more the title, and the poem, have a double meaning and can be read not only in Darwinian terms, but also as will be demonstrated in the end of this section through Christian eschatology. It is important to acknowledge this issue, because, as Gérard Genette points out, ‘if the text is an object to be read, the title ... is an object to circulated — or, if you prefer, a subject of conversation’.¹⁴⁸ This attribute of the title is especially important when exploring *AoM*; as noted in the previous chapter, the connection to Darwin’s works was and continues to be the main focal point for anyone who is writing on the volume. One of the reasons for such attention could have been the element previously mentioned in the introduction: it is possible that the intended title was supposed to be *The Ascent of Man and Other Poems*, which would have signalled to the reader that in its structure, the volume would be more akin to that of *The Prophecy of Saint Oran and Other Poems* rather than, as the current title suggests, to *The Heather on Fire*. The significance of the chosen title can also be seen through Genette’s definitions of various types of book titles; the one used for *AoM* is described as ‘thematic’ since the “‘subject matter” of the text’ is overtly present in it. This type of title guides the critic and the reader toward a very particular interpretation of the book, and, considering the impact made by Darwin’s works on Victorian society, their reading most likely will be that the whole of the volume is connected with evolutionary theories.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 75.

¹⁴⁹ Gérard Genette. Jane E. Lewin, transl. *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) p. 78.

Genette also includes those readers who had bought the book but had not read it in the list of addresses; this, however, can be omitted in relation to *AoM* considering the volume’s print run.

In regard to the title we have to mention another issue connected to the way in which the name of the volume and the title poem are sometimes formatted. It is customary to use italics for long poems, which is not an issue with such volumes as *Saint Oran and Other Poems*, yet in the case of *The Ascent of Man* using the same type of formatting for the title poem as well as the volume is potentially confusing. Whereas there is no information on the process of naming

Examining Genette's discussion of the potential addressees of a book's title, it can be observed that he includes not only the actual readers, of the volume but also those who participate in its 'dissemination and "reception"', which includes 'booksellers, critics and gossip columnists', amongst others.¹⁵⁰ Applying this to the title of Blind's volume and the way it was advertised and received, it is not surprising that the Darwinian/evolutionary connection was and is the main attraction for the reviewers, critics and readers. An additional impact of the above is the reader/critic's perception of which one of Darwin's books is connected to the poem/volume. Based solely on the title, it might be presumed that the main influence is *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*. However, as this section will demonstrate, Darwin's earlier publication, *The Origin of Species*, produced a larger effect on *AoM*.

Existing Critical Studies of *AoM* and Evolution

As mentioned above, themes connected to evolution are the most obvious choice in exploring *AoM*. Yet, as is the case with most aspects of Blind's literary heritage, these have not yet been fully examined. Some of the most notable works that touch on the topic covered in this section are Jason Rudy's 'Rapturous Forms: Mathilde Blind's Darwinian Poetics' and *Electric Meters*, John Holmes' *Darwin's Bards: British and American Poetry in the Age of Evolution* as well as doctoral theses by Adam Coccaro *Evolution and Secular Teleology in the Progressive Epics of Percy Bysshe Shelley, Mathilde Blind, and Thomas Hardy* and Catherine Birch's *Evolutionary Feminism in Late-Victorian Women's Poetry: Mathilde Blind, Constance Naden and May Kendall*.

the volume, a pencilled note, 'The Ascent of Man and Other Poems', on a clipping of the volume's advertisement. As the handwriting is similar to Blind's, one can surmise that this was supposed to be the title of the volume; however, because there is no additional information about the process of naming the volume the decision to shorten the title could have been made by either Blind or her publisher

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 74-5.

One of the ways used to approach the representation of evolution in *AoM* is through rhythm and form as demonstrated by Jason R. Rudy in the essay ‘Rapturous Forms: Mathilde Blind’s Darwinian Poetics’ as well as in his book *Electric Meters*, where a section in the chapter ‘Rapture and the Flesh, Swinburne to Blind’ is devoted to the discussion of Blind’s poetry and examining her ‘complex ideal of rapturous communion from the perspective of evolutionary theory’.¹⁵¹ Rudy’s argument is based on the ideas expressed in the thirteenth chapter of *Descent*, which deals with the secondary sexual characteristics of birds, as well as on the nineteenth chapter, which speaks of the secondary sexual characteristics of man; he focuses particularly on the sections of these chapters that address the development of voice and musical ability. Thus, both texts open by exploring the place of rhythm in Darwin’s theories: ‘Rhythm ... marks Darwin’s ideas of evolution and especially his theories of sexual selection’; it is ‘a kind of language ... more universally accessible ... because ... it is felt physiologically rather than processed intellectually’.¹⁵² Applying this statement to Blind’s works, Rudy notes that she ‘renders Darwin’s tacit argument regarding the essential truth of rhythm into a truth of poetic form’.¹⁵³ Rudy supports his argument by quoting from Blind’s description of the creation of earth which, for him, best represents the interaction between her poetry, rhythm, and Darwin’s theories:

a rhythmical chain
Reaching from chaos and welter of struggle and pain,
Far into vistas empyreal

¹⁵¹ It has to be noted that Rudy does not only focus on *AoM*, he also looks at *Tarantella* and *Dramas in Miniature* Jason R. Rudy, ‘Rapturous Forms: Mathilde Blind’s Darwinian Poetics’ *Victorian Literature and Culture* (2006), 34, 443

As ‘rapturous communion’ Rudy understands ‘a flash of sympathetic confederacy’: a passionate “exchange” of intimate thoughts and feelings between the poet and her readers.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 444.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 446.

A similar approach can be seen in *Electric Meters*, where Rudy explores Blind's work by combining Darwinian ideas with electrodynamic theory.¹⁵⁴ Here he pays more attention to the rhythm in Blind's description of the creation of earth: 'Blind's primeval atoms of "measureless speed" fall into measured and exacting metrical pulsations'.¹⁵⁵ To support this statement, he uses the first five lines from the first canto of 'Chaunts of Life':

Struck out of dim fluctuant forces and shock of electrical vapour,
Repelled and attracted the atoms flashed mingling in union primeval
And over the face of the waters far heaving in limitless twilight
Auroral pulsations thrilled faintly, and, striking the blank heaving surface,
The measureless speed of their motion now leaped into light on the waters.
(*'Chants'*, I, ll. 1-5, p. 7)

He notes that these lines 'echo the Greek hexameter ... emphasising the epic nature of the evolutionary scene'.¹⁵⁶ However, the book does not contain a more detailed discussion of the metre employed by Blind in the poem. Rudy also observes that Blind's poetry often exemplifies 'the difficult tensions between rhythm and meter, between individual experience and the ordered structure of the world'.¹⁵⁷ In relation to 'AoM' Rudy sees this as 'sonic dissonance', an example of which can be seen in the following lines:

Through the unhinged door's discordant slamming
Ring the gruesome sounds of savage strife –
Howls of babes, the drunken father's damning,
Counter-cursing of the shrill-tongued wife
(*'Sorrow'*, p.p. 96-7)

¹⁵⁴ Jason R. Rudy, *Electric Meters: Victorian Physiological Poetics* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2009), p.155.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 157. The metre used by Blind in this part of the poem is the accentual hexameter, which became popular through Goethe and was used by, for example, Arthur Hugh Clough. See Joseph Phelan, *The Music of Verse: Metrical Experiment in Nineteenth-Century Poetry* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

¹⁵⁷ Rudy, *Electric Meters*, p. 161.

These lines ‘help cast a sceptical eye on the place of rhythmic communication – Darwin’s “articulate language” – in modern human civilization.’¹⁵⁸ Rudy’s approach to Blind’s involvement with Darwin’s ideas presents a very interesting perspective although it would have benefitted from knowing Blind’s interactions with Darwin’s ideas as it would present a more compelling account of ‘AoM’ as well as additional insight into understanding the tension in the world created by her poems.

Another problematic point is the connection made between the metre and Darwin’s theories, as the same metre that Rudy mentions was popular with several pre-Darwinian poets such as Longfellow and Clough, which suggests that the development of the long line is not directly connected to the advent of Darwinian thinking. Whereas this does not completely invalidate Rudy’s ideas that Blind employs this metre and line length to ‘emphasis the epic nature of the evolutionary scene,’ it introduces a degree of reasonable doubt to this conclusion.¹⁵⁹ An additional point that supports this doubt can be found in Blind’s poetry reviews that demonstrate substantial knowledge of prosody, for example, in the signed review of Eysteinn Asgrimsson’s translation of the Icelandic poem *Lilja* (*The Lily*) published in the *Dark Blue* in June 1871.¹⁶⁰ Here we can see that the largest part of this article is devoted to the matters of alliteration and assonance that governed the medieval Icelandic/Norse poetry as well as that Blind provides an explanation and analysis of the metre, all of which demonstrates her interest in and knowledge of these matters. What is more, Blind was one of the few who noticed William Morris’s modification to the medieval alliteration pattern in *Love is not Enough; or, the*

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 161-2.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p.157.

¹⁶⁰ Blind *Lilja* ("The Lily") by Eystein Asgrimsson, trans. Eiríkr Magnússon, 'The Dark Blue', June 1871, 524-28.

Freeing of Pharamond: a Morality.¹⁶¹ She notes that Morris does not confine ‘himself to the three customary alliterative syllables in a couplet’ where the new alliterative wave rises ‘before the preceding one has completely subsided and produces an inexplicably rich and far-reaching echo of sounds’.¹⁶² These two reviews as well as the fact that throughout ‘AoM’ we see a number of different metrical and rhythmical patterns, and line length also suggest that association of just one of these patterns with evolution is a rather simplified view of Blind’s involvement with evolution and prosody.

The next book that discusses ‘AoM’ and evolutionary theories is John Holmes’s *Darwin’s Bards: British and American Poetry in the Age of Evolution*, which explores a number of poetic responses to evolutionary theories and covers the period between the early nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Discussing Blind’s work, Holmes describes it as ‘non-Darwinian’ due to her apparent discomfort with the violence depicted in Darwin’s works: ‘Blind’s naïve narrator is appalled by this truth, in part because it is genuinely appalling to witness but also because it is utterly discordant with her prior view of life as an ordered, moral and harmonious creation’.¹⁶³ However, Holmes also suggests that because of this sentiment ‘Blind understands Darwinism better and faces it more honestly than most late Victorian poets’.¹⁶⁴ Holmes’s description of Blind’s poetry as non-Darwinian raises the question of how he identifies Blind’s ‘better understanding of Darwinism’ based on her poetry. This question, however, remains open.

Adam Coccaro, whose treatment of the connection between Blind and Shelley was discussed in the previous section, also addresses Blind’s Darwinism. For him Blind

¹⁶¹ Blind, ‘*Love is not Enough; or, the Freeing of Pharamond: a Morality* by William Morris’, *The Athenaeum*, 23 November 1872, 657-8.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 657.

¹⁶³ John Holmes, *Darwin’s Bards. British and American Poetry in the Age of Evolution* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh university Press, 2009), p. 51.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

and her understanding of evolutionary theories belong to the group of authors from 1880s and 90s that also includes Drummond, Peter Kropotkin, and Arabella Buckley who ‘saw a different aspect of Darwin’s texts and focused on the development of the family unit, altruism, and even love, as the result of evolution’.¹⁶⁵ In his exploration of Darwinism in Blind’s poetry, which apart from ‘AoM’ includes poems from *The Prophecy of Saint Oran and Other Poems* and *Birds of Passage: Songs of the Orient and Occident*, Coccaro particularly focuses on the issues connected with altruism or *caritas*, seeing them as an amalgamation of Shelley’s and Darwin’s ideas. Regarding Blind’s interpretation of Darwinism in ‘AoM’, Coccaro sees the poem as Blind’s attempt ‘to replace the Christian teleology of the traditional epic with a secular teleology of progress’, where she explores some of the ideas mentioned by Darwin ‘almost as an aside’.¹⁶⁶ What is more, he also includes an account of Blind’s response to the violence present in nature and its connection to Darwin’s theories. Coccaro argues that ‘Blind’s intent in writing *AoM* is to place a cruel, amoral nature into Shelley’s framework’.¹⁶⁷ As the previous section demonstrated, there are certain elements of Shelley’s philosophy that produced a lasting effect on Blind; however, some of her comments in the lecture on Shelley and Darwin suggest that even if Shelley is the primary poetical influence on Blind around the time she was composing *AoM*, Darwin’s theories were more prominent in her worldview. Therefore, one can argue that rather than taking Shelley as a framework Darwin’s theories form the core into which Shelley’s ideas are placed.

One of the most recent and detailed explorations of Blind’s work in relation to evolutionary theories can be found in Catherine Birch’s doctoral thesis *Evolutionary*

¹⁶⁵ Coccaro, p. 154.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 150, p. 151.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 186.

Feminism in Late-Victorian Women's Poetry: Mathilde Blind, Constance Naden and May Kendall. Amongst other things, Birch focusses on the way in which Blind, Naden and Kendall employ Darwin's theories 'to support a variety of different, and even opposing, arguments, especially in relation to questions of gender'.¹⁶⁸ Birch's discussion of these poets stresses the uniqueness of Blind's position amongst the aforementioned poets; she was the only one old enough to 'remember pre-evolutionary theories ... [as well as] to have observed the controversy surrounding the publication of the *Origin*'.¹⁶⁹ Indeed, Blind had already moved to England by 1858 and was seventeen years old at the time, but, as will be discussed later, it is not known precisely when Blind read Darwin's work, and considering her stay in Switzerland, which happened around the same time, it is difficult to estimate the precise extent of her exposure to the 'controversy around the publication'.¹⁷⁰

In a similar fashion to the previous authors, Birch picks up on the issues of violence and the struggle for existence in Blind's work, which she discusses with a particular stress on the third part of 'AoM', 'The Leading of Sorrow'. Discussing Blind's depiction of the struggle for existence, Birch argues that it is not connected to the moral issues of society, 'but ... is based on animal instinct which humans should overcome'.¹⁷¹ However, Birch's opinion on the violence connected to this process differs from the one mentioned above; she suggests that 'Blind appears untroubled by the destructive qualities of Darwin's Mother Nature, and may even have been attracted by them'.¹⁷² Birch notes

¹⁶⁸ Catherine Elizabeth Birch, *Evolutionary Feminism in Late-Victorian Women's Poetry: Mathilde Blind, Constance Naden and May Kendall* (PhD Thesis, The University of Birmingham, 2011), p. 2.

Some of the more general aspects covered by this thesis will go in the literature review in the introduction.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹⁷⁰ What is more Blind's none of the existing documents track Blind's proficiency in English before her move to London and her first decade there. This aspect, sadly, is not often explored when discussing her poetry and intellectual background.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 239.

that 'Blind's work demonstrates her awareness of the association between the representation of nature and the representation of women' using Blind's novel *Tarantella* as an example.¹⁷³ Another way in which Birch's approach to the theme differs from that of previous authors is in her use of the concept of "otherness"; she notes that Blind uses it in order to 'explore real or imagined links between the groups that are characterised as — other', creating a connection between, for example, gender and race.¹⁷⁴ The notion of race is also considered in the discussion of human evolution in the 'Chaunts of Life' where, according to Birch, Blind shows 'a clear awareness of the ways in which the progress of civilisation has depended on exploitation and the "toil of captive hands" (IV 74)'.¹⁷⁵

It is also worth noting that Birch belongs to the small number of scholars who, in their discussion of Blind's poetry, pay attention to the other poems published in *AoM*. In her discussion of Darwin's theories, she draws on 'The Teamster' as an example of Blind's engagement with the theory of sexual selection. Birch argues that the poem uses 'the imagery of sexual selection ... to describe the relationship' between the characters (Sam and May) in the ballad and connects sexual selection to prescriptive gender roles in which the female character is put in a position where she cannot choose for herself.¹⁷⁶ She states that Blind's 'struggle to find a realistic role for 'May' is related to Darwin's depiction of human relationships' where there is no defined 'role for women'.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷³ Ibid., p. 239.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 166.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 166.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 217.

Sam and Ned are compared respectively to horses and to sheep or cows whereas May is described through flora-related imagery. Cp. ll. 17, 161 and 172 for Sam and Ned's description and ll. 26, 28, 30 amongst other for May.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 218.

It seems appropriate to conclude this overview on current critical works on *AoM* and Darwin with a brief comment on Ralph Pordzik's *Victorian Wastelands*. In this monograph, Pordzik primarily focusses on the representations of the apocalypse in Victorian poetry, exploring the works of such authors as Tennyson and Arnold as well as those of some lesser known poets like Thomas Campbell, Eugenius Roche, and Mathilde Blind. His discussion of Blind's work centres on the manner in which the two sonnets from 'PoA', both named 'Red Sunsets, 1883', combine evolutionary concepts and an apocalyptic mood, which were prevalent at the turn of the century. Addressing the evolutionary aspect of these sonnets, Pordzik argues that Blind draws not only on Darwin's theories, but also on contemporary geological theories:

In two of her sonnets employing apocalyptic imagery, Mathilde Blind evokes Darwin's evolutionary theory and nineteenth century geological discourse in order to portray the world as a battleground of violence and dynamic forces — the central conflict of her apocalypse exposes itself in the almost pictorial representation of outrageous events not yet fully understood and still only presentable in the idiom of Christian Revelation.¹⁷⁸

Here Pordzik suggests that Blind is using the language of Christian eschatology as a prism for creating a new light from Darwin's ideas. However, as we have seen in the previous sections of this chapter, especially in the one on Mazzini, Blind believes that the world can be made better through human effort with evolution playing an important part in this development. Thus, although Pordzik's observation of Blind picking up on the presence of violence in Darwin's theories, his conflation between them and the religious language disagrees with Blind's melioristic persuasion. What is more, the poems used by Pordzik

¹⁷⁸ Ralph Pordzik, *Victorian Wastelands. Apocalyptic Discourse in Nineteenth Century Poetry* (Heidelberg: Universitaetsverlag Winter, 2012), p. 41.

to illustrate his argument are not the most representative for Blind's interaction with Darwin's ideas. Therefore, if the information would have been available on the intellectual history of the poems it would have affected Pordzik's reading of them as it would have changed his perception of Blind's worldview.

The above suggests that in the discussions of Blind's interaction with evolutionary theories the greatest amount of attention is given to the application of theories of sexual selection (Birch and Rudy) as well as the variety of responses to Blind's engagement with the idea of violence in nature. None of these studies, however, contains a detailed discussion of the effects produced on *AoM* by Darwin or incorporates Blind's own opinion on the subject into its discussion. As Darwin's ideas are the element that attracted the readers and critics to *AoM*, it is important to develop a better comprehension of their role in the volume. Thus, this section aims to explore Darwin's effect on *AoM* through her reception of his work, with particular emphasis on Blind's reaction to the fight for survival in nature and the human world and her depiction of this fight in comparison to Darwin's.

Of particular value in this regard are two previously unused sources that contain Blind's opinions of the evolutionary theories. These can be found in two interviews given after the publication of *AoM*, in 1890 and 1891.¹⁷⁹ Both pieces highlight the importance of *The Origin of Species* for the creation of the title poem and, importantly, present a very similar account of the time Blind spent with the book and her initial reaction to Darwin's theories.¹⁸⁰ The first interview, published in the *Women's Penny Paper*, records that 'The

¹⁷⁹ One could argue that her lecture on Shelley and Darwin could also be included in this list; however, as this chapter will demonstrate the lecture predominately contains Blind's opinions on Shelley than on Darwin.

¹⁸⁰ It has to be noted that none of the interviews mention whether this was the first time Blind encountered Darwin's theories.

Origin of Species was almost my [Blind's] sole companion during some summer months I spent in a cottage at Braemar', and about a year and a half later, *Hearth and Home* presents readers with the following account: '[Darwin's] work "The Origin of Species" was my sole companion one summer, which I spent in a cottage at Braemar'.¹⁸¹ Thus, it can be seen that both interviews concur in their descriptions of *Origin's* effects on Blind's emotional state and the change in her perception of nature, as described in the two interview excerpts below. However, there is an important discrepancy between the two accounts that must be noted as it refers to the way in which *Origin's* influence manifests itself in 'AoM'. The following two excerpts contain Blind's reaction to the book and pinpoint the parts of the poem that best reflect this response. According to the earlier interview, the part of 'AoM' in which to look for Darwin's influence is 'The Leading of Sorrow':

The idea of the struggle for existence, of the incessant preying of life upon life in the process of evolution, took such a hold upon my imagination, that the whole of Nature ... wore for me an evil and sinister aspect.... It was an awful time, full of the sense of unutterable loss. The Universe seemed void, and Nature a cheat. You will find all this expressed in 'The Leading of Sorrow'.¹⁸²

In the second article, however, it is not just 'The Leading of Sorrow' but the entire 'AoM' that is said to demonstrate Darwin's influence:

¹⁸¹ Anon., 'Interview', *Women's Penny Paper*, 14 June 1890, 397-8, 397.

Anon., 'Chats with Celebrities', *Hearth and Home*, 24 December 1891, 165-6, 165.

Braemar is a town in Scottish Highlands. This poses a question whether Blind was working on the ideas for *The Heather on Fire* and *AoM* at the same time. Sadly, at present there is no definite proof for or against this.

In regard to Blind reading Darwin's work while staying in Scotland we can refer to a previously unknown letter from Ludwig Mond to A. R. Wallace, where, trying to provide additional material for Wallace, Mond comments on how Blind became interested in Darwin's work and in the theory of evolution. He describes Blind's first encounter with Charles Darwin's works as follows:

Mathilde Blind, when she first became acquainted with Darwin's works, retired to a solitary farm house for nine months, leaving all her friends & her other work, & devoting herself entirely to the study of the new gospel. The result of the devotion to this study during this time was her poem: "The Ascent of Man", which was ultimately published in 1889. (Mond, Ludwig, Letter to A. R. Wallace, 1899, Add Ms 46437, f. 46 b.)

¹⁸² Anon., 'Interview', 397.

the birds, the beasts, the sweet flowers even, seemed all engines of destruction, the universe appeared void, and death the only reality. It was then I thought out 'The Ascent of Man', in which I dealt with the evolution of humanity, and the gradual development of love, pity and, and justice which impart value to life.¹⁸³

Both extracts demonstrate how deeply Darwin's descriptions of the mechanics of the natural world affected Blind and suggest that their effect is traceable throughout 'AoM'. Indeed, we do not have to search for long to encounter the first example; one of the lines from the second canto of 'Chaunts of Life' repeats a phrase from the first interview, 'incessant preying of life upon life', almost verbatim: 'And from the mightiest to the least / Each preys upon the other's life' ('Chaunts', II, ll. 64-5, p. 12). Further instances can be found shortly after the above: 'life is life's insatiate grave' ('Chaunts', II, l. 84, p. 13) and 'where life is whetted upon life' ('Chaunts', II, l. 87, p. 13). In a similar manner, most of the canto progresses from the creation of the flora and fauna to the arrival of a human being, who also contributes to the perpetual fight for survival and slowly draws the author's attention away from the natural world. Traces of the same struggle for survival are also present in other poems from *AoM*, albeit they are less overt than in the title poem. In 'PoA', with its focus on rural nature, we see the same forces at work. Here, however, they manifest themselves through the themes of procreation and the circle of life, starting with the cyclical movement throughout the seasons that binds together all of the poems and ending with the individual poems describing various stages of life. The last part of the volume, 'Love in Exile', with its fashionable and more gender-stereotypical focus on love, can be read through the lens of the battle for procreation.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸³ Anon., 'Chats with Celebrities', 165.

¹⁸⁴ Edmund Gosse in the work *The Future of English Poetry* states that 'erotic sentiment has perhaps unduly occupied the imaginative art of the past. In particular, the poets of the late nineteenth century were interested to excess in love'. p. 12.

In both cases, more detailed examples of how the themes relate to the poems will be provided later in this section.

The last point that should be highlighted in regard to the interviews is their stress on *The Origin of Species* rather than *The Descent of Man* as the key source that affected Blind's perception of nature. Blind's stress on this particular work as a source for the poem suggests that 'AoM' is an attempt to create an alternative parallel narrative to the one presented in *Descent* rather than continuing the ideas present in this book. Amongst Blind's documented discussions of Darwin's theories, *Descent* is mentioned in the 1886 lecture on Shelley and Darwin where she argues that Shelley, influenced by Rousseau, 'glorif[ies] not only the future but also the distant past at the expense of the present' and believes 'that ALL VICE arose from the ruin of healthful innocence' [capitalisation Blind's], which, as Blind states, can be refuted based on 'Darwin's *Descent of Man*, that every kind of unnatural appetite and vice has prevailed among men in a state of nature'.¹⁸⁵ The task for her, then, was to reconcile this view of organic nature as a whole, and human nature in particular, as inherently violent and vicious, with her abiding commitment to an optimistic and positive outlook on human progress.

Given that in the first interview Blind points to 'The Leading of Sorrow' as the portion of 'AoM' that is most representative of her altered perception of nature, it is appropriate to examine this first. One of the themes that runs through the entirety of 'The Leading of Sorrow' is connected to the narrator's attempts to accept the violence present not only in the human world, but also in the oceans:

Lo, beneath those waters surging, flowing,
I beheld the Deep's fantastic bowers;

¹⁸⁵ Blind, 'Shelley and Darwin', p. 19.

Yet even here, as in the fire-eyed panther,
 In disguise the eternal hunger lay,
 For each feathery, velvet-tufted anther
 Lay in ambush waiting for its prey.
 ('Leading of Sorrow', pp. 87-8, ll. 41-2, 49-52)

and on earth:

But, the forest slumber rudely breaking,
Through the silence rings a piercing yell;
At the cry unnumbered beasts, awaking,
With their howls the loud confusion swell.
'Tis the cry of some frail creature panting
In the tiger's lacerating grip;
In its flesh carnivorous teeth implanting,
While the blood smokes round his wrinkled lip
(‘Leading of Sorrow’, p. 89, ll. 73-80).

These lines echo the opening cantos of ‘Chaunts of Life’, which address the creation of the world. Indeed, moving from the water to the earth and then to human beings, with each element appearing innocent on the surface only to exhibit a fierce struggle for a place in the sun, conveys the same feelings of danger, loss, and anxiety about the never-ending war. For example, in the first set of lines, the depiction of ocean life changes from descriptions such as ‘fantastic bowers’ and ‘jewelled fish’, which portray the ocean as a strange and exotic, but not a dangerous, place, to the ‘living grave’ — a context that presupposes a constant fight and death.

The second extract presents a comparable situation, with the slumbering forest awoken by ‘a piercing yell’, and reveals a bloody battle between the animals. Soon after, the narrator moves to the human world, where the reader is, in a similar manner, presented with a world that seems idyllic in contrast to the ones presented earlier in the poem: “Peace on Earth,” I murmured; “let us linger - / Here the wage of life seems good at least” (‘Leading of Sorrow’, p. 92, ll. 133-4). This can be read as the expression of hope

that humans will differ from the animals and be able to create a system which does not succumb to primal instincts. However, the succeeding stanzas prove this peace to be illusory by demonstrating how quickly a sudden cataclysm alters a thriving and peaceful society, in both urban and rural contexts, and brings out the same traits in men and women that frightened the narrator about the animal kingdom and were mentioned in both interviews. The struggle for existence presented by Blind in these verses depicts the same universality as described by Darwin in the third chapter of *Origin*, where he discusses the universality of this fight and suggests that it ‘inevitably follows from the high rate at which all organic beings tend to increase.’¹⁸⁶ Blind’s attention to these and depiction of what can be seen as an increased competition within the species of the same genus suggests that her understanding of this battle is in accord with Darwin’s principles. What is more, the struggles and violence described in the lines above resonate with Blind’s interviews.

Blind’s ideas on inter- and intra-species competition and, especially, the reactions of her protagonist are comparable to Darwin’s ideas expressed in the following passage from *Origin*:

Nothing is easier than to admit in words the truth of the universal struggle for life, or more difficult—at least I have found it so—than constantly to bear this conclusion in mind. Yet unless it be thoroughly engrained in the mind, I am convinced that the whole economy of nature, with every fact on distribution, rarity, abundance, extinction, and variation, will be dimly seen or quite misunderstood. We behold the face of nature bright with gladness, we often see superabundance of food; we do not see, or we forget, that the birds which are idly singing round us mostly live on insects or seeds, and are thus constantly destroying life; or we forget how largely these songsters, or their eggs, or their nestlings, are destroyed by birds and beasts of prey; we do not always bear in mind, that though food may be now superabundant, it is not so at all seasons of each recurring year.¹⁸⁷ [emphasis mine]

¹⁸⁶ Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (London: Penguin, 1968. [reprint of the first edition]), p. 116.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 115-6.

Darwin's description of how nature is perceived as overtly pleasant yet, unbeknown to most observers, underneath the peaceful exterior is a never ending battle for survival, directly relates to Blind's perception of nature as described in the interviews and to the experiences of the narrator as can be seen throughout 'AoM'.

One of the more representative examples of the battle for survival is present in 'Chaunts of Life', where a considerable portion of the section describes the struggle for survival in the animal kingdom:

War rages on the teeming earth;
The hot and sanguinary fight
Begins with each new creature's birth:
A dreadful war where might is right;
Where still the strongest slay and win,
Where weakness is the only sin.

There is no truce to this drawn battle,
Which ends but to begin again;
The drip of blood, the hoarse death-rattle,
The roar of rage, the shriek of pain,
Are rife in fairest grove and dell,
Turning earth's flowery haunts to hell.

A hell of hunger, hatred, lust,
Which goads all creatures here below,
Or blindworm wriggling in the dust,
Or penguin in the Polar snow:
A hell where there is none to save,
Where life is life's insatiate grave

('Chaunts of Life', II, pp. 12-13, ll. 67-84)

In these lines Blind builds on Darwin's already mentioned observation on the reason behind the struggle for existence. These lines also provide additional evidence that Darwin's concept of struggle strongly influenced 'AoM'. In *Origin*, Darwin includes the following explanation of this idea: 'I use the term Struggle for Existence in a large and metaphorical sense, including dependence of one being on another, and including (which is more important) not only the life of the individual, but success in leaving progeny', an

attitude that is present throughout the volume and particularly obvious in the passage quoted on the next page.¹⁸⁸ Here it must be noted that Blind's attitude to the issue, as presented in the poem, also includes "a pinch" of Tennyson's 'nature, red in tooth and claw', which can be seen in the fact that she focuses less on the 'dependence of one being on another' and more on the violent side of nature.¹⁸⁹ This is particularly noticeable in the lines above, where Blind uses exclusively war-related imagery, including such words as 'battle', 'war', 'pain', 'blood', 'hell', and 'grave', and equates weakness with sin. Such a representation of the world, especially the lines that address the beginning of the world, again provides connections to the interviews and can thus be seen as a result of *Origin's* influence on the poem.

The material presented above demonstrates that Blind dwelt heavily on the third and fourth chapters of *Origin*, that focus on the struggle for existence and natural selection respectively, with the similarities between Darwin's and Blind's texts visible on the level of the ideas both authors present in their works. Indeed, the lines from 'AoM' quoted above can be compared with the following passage from *Origin*: 'the face of Nature may be compared to a yielding surface, with ten thousand sharp wedges packed close together and driven inwards by incessant blows, sometimes one wedge being struck, and then another with greater force'.¹⁹⁰ Both extracts demonstrate tonal and linguistic similarities with the focus on the omnipresent violence and struggle — 'sharp wedges', 'struck', and 'force' by Darwin and 'slay' and 'pain', amongst others, by Blind. This also incorporates the concept of the 'survival of the fittest', originally a Malthusian argument which strongly affected the development of Darwin's theory and became an important element

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 116.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 116. Tennyson, 'In Memoriam', Canto LVI, l. 15.

¹⁹⁰ Darwin., p. 119.

in *Origin's* philosophy; he describes this principle as a situation where 'one individual [struggles] with another of the same species, or with the individuals of distinct species, or with the physical conditions of life'.¹⁹¹

Blind's interpretation of evolution also includes references to sexual selection, a point that is usually connected to *Descent* rather than *Origin*. However, from the way Blind describes this process it is likely that *Origin* was the primary source for her ideas on the subject. For instance, Blind writes,

The lust of life's delirious fires
Burned like a fever in their blood

...

To seize coy females in the fray

...

And amorously urged them on
 In wood or wild to court their mate,
Proudly displaying in the sun
 With antics strange and looks elate,
The vigour of their mighty thews
Or charm of million-coloured hues

(‘Chaunts’, II, p. 10-11, ll. 31, 32, 35, 37-42).

Her illustration of ‘courtship’ clearly draws on the description provided in *Origin*, where Darwin speaks of ‘a struggle between the males for possession of the females’.¹⁹² In the first two lines of the excerpt above (ll. 31-32), Blind describes the deeply ingrained need to procreate comparing it to a fire running through blood, and, in line with Darwin’s theory, it is the males who are attempting to attract a mate (l. 35). Furthermore, the last six lines above describe the male representative of an unspecified species displaying, what Darwin describes as, his ‘colour, structure, or ornament’ to attract a mate.¹⁹³ He continues the idea by stating that ‘in many cases, victory will depend ... on having special

¹⁹¹ Ibid., p. 117.

¹⁹² Darwin, p. 136.

¹⁹³ Ibid., p. 137.

weapons' that are peculiar to the gender, such as the 'the mane to the lion, the shoulder-pad to the boar, and the hooked jaw to the male salmon', an element of the battle for survival that Blind also draws onto in, for example, line 41.¹⁹⁴ As these lines demonstrate, even if *The Descent of Man* was important for the development of ideas present in 'AoM', *Origin* plays a more important role than has previously been acknowledged in Blind's understanding of sexual selection and evolution.

The other two parts of the volume contain references to Darwin's work in a much less overt manner than 'AoM'. However, one particular facet of the struggle for survival, which relates to sexual selection, stands out here. It can be presumed that Blind is exploring how the violence that shocked her in the animal world translates to the human one; this theme is directly connected to those explored in the title poem, which demonstrate the universality of the fight to survive. In this regard, the most representative poem from 'PoA' is 'The Teamster', with its focus on the battle for procreation. It depicts first one and then two human males fighting for a female of their species (see the passage on the next page for the description of the fight). The manner in which the fight is presented is comparable to the description of animals provided in *Origin*: 'every single organic being around us may be said to be striving to the utmost to increase in numbers'.¹⁹⁵

Birch's discussion of the poem mentioned earlier highlighted some of the elements relating to Darwinian sexual selection, but it did not fully explore the idea in relation to the whole of the ballad. Apart from the introductory stanzas, the poem tells the story of the village teamster's attempt to secure the best possible mate, which allows us

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 137.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 119.

to read the descriptions of the characters in the context of the ‘special weapons’ mentioned earlier.¹⁹⁶ Furthermore, the manner in which the characters are presented is infused with the cultural norms of the period. For example, May, the teamster’s love interest, is presented as an ornamental female, a prime candidate for an ‘angel in the house’. One way to interpret this is along the lines of Birch’s reading — that is Blind was forced to put May in this position because there were no other roles available for women in Darwin’s theories most likely due to the prevailing attitudes toward women. However, taking into account the fact that Blind was an ardent supporter of women’s rights along with this section’s argument that ‘AoM’ interprets and builds upon Darwin’s theories, the placement of May could be perceived as a criticism of gender norms and behavioural norms existing in society, especially as there is no fairy-tale ending for May and Sam. This connection can be best observed in the second part of the ballad, which speaks of the events after Sam’s return to the village. Sam’s reaction to the news that May is engaged to another (‘the Kimber girl was to be wed / To Betsy’s Ned’ [ll. 155-6]) is to fight the competitor:

Then they fell to with faces set for fight,
 And hit each other hard with rustic pride;
 But Sam, whose arm with iron force could smite,
 Knocked his cowed rival down, and won his bride.
(‘The Teamster’, ll. 169-72, p. 134)

This fight between two individuals of the same species is close to Darwin’s definition of the struggle for survival that was presented several pages earlier. In addition, these lines bring to mind the descriptions from the title poem relating to sexual selection, some of which were also quoted above and resonate with the descriptions of fights present

¹⁹⁶ One can argue that the latter point plays a considerable role in the description of the characters, especially in regard to May’s appearance with its ornamental qualities.

in the fourth chapter of *Origin*; for example, ‘male alligators have been described as fighting, bellowing, and whirling round, like Indians in a war-dance, for the possession of the females; male salmons have been observed fighting all day long; male stag-beetles often bear wounds from the huge mandibles of other males’.¹⁹⁷ It can be presumed that by applying the same principles to all life on the planet, Blind aims to demonstrate the universality of certain urges and thus evoke the universality of the principles established in *Origin*. This might seem to be contradictory to the previously noted opinion that the moral and mental development of humankind suppresses its animalistic urges, but, as can be seen from Blind’s second lecture on Shelley, the understanding that these primitive behaviours are not removed from the human beings as they progress through history is a natural development of an author’s work being informed by modern science.¹⁹⁸ However, perusing *AoM* we observe that both these points of view cohabit in the volume, a point that suggests that Blind might have been dismayed at how these primal elements could affect the future development of humanity with the direction of the latter being a common concern in the literature of the late nineteenth century.

In this respect it should be noted that by extending these theories to the human being, Blind, whether purposefully or not, enters the quagmire of social/cultural Darwinism, which, as noted earlier, was one of the current misinterpretations of Darwin’s work. For instance, one of the several possible interpretations of the ballad sees Sam’s unsuccessful attempt to secure his bloodline as directly connected to the crime he committed and the general state of his morals.¹⁹⁹ However, surveying the volume we

¹⁹⁷ Darwin, p. 136.

¹⁹⁸ See Blind’s lecture on Shelley and Darwin, especially pp. 12 and 15-6.

¹⁹⁹ Considering that this branch of ideas was itself an interpretation of Darwin’s ideas rather than being present in his works this line of enquiry will not be continued here. It is worth noting that Blind corresponded with Karl Pearson who

cannot find enough evidence to support the view that it is infused by the social Darwinist or eugenic ideas even if these were widespread in late-nineteenth-century society, especially in discussions concerned with the perceived competition between classes and races. This is also supported by the emphasis that Blind made on understanding human history and the world as a whole with the poems describing universal experience rather than a particular nation or race. The other poems in the volume treat life in a similar manner by addressing practices and feelings that could be familiar to a person from any class or race.

The third part of the volume, 'Love in Exile', can also be seen as referring to the process of sexual selection. For example, several poems included in this section can be read as lamenting the loss of a potential mate, where appearance can play as great a role as in the animal kingdom, with evidence present in lines such as 'your looks have touched my soul with bright ineffable emotion' (XVII, l.1) or 'brown eyes with long black lashes' (XVIII, l.1). However, it is likely that this part of the volume was less heavily influenced by Darwin's ideas and bears instead a greater connection to the ideas of mourning present at the time in both society (e.g. Queen Victoria mourning Prince Albert) and literature (e.g. Alfred Lord Tennyson's *In Memoriam*).²⁰⁰

To conclude this section, two contextual points need to be addressed. The first one refers to another prominent evolutionary theorist: Alfred Russel Wallace, who wrote

was interested in eugenics. However, on consulting the two available letters it is difficult to establish to what degree, if at all, they have discussed this particular branch of evolutionary ideas.

²⁰⁰ In relation to this theme one has to note that the lyrical I (not necessarily Blind herself) could have not only mourned a person but the country of her childhood or even her brother Ferdinand to whom she was apparently close. Furthermore, based on some of the texts of these poems one can conclude that the addressee of the sentiments might not necessarily be a love interest or even human; so poem XV might be addressed to someone who the narrator was not necessarily in love, but who's presence was extremely comforting, which could even be a cat. Therefore, as there is no additional background information at present the question of origin of these poems remains open.

the preface to the 1900 reprint of *AoM*. According to the material held at the BL, he and Blind had corresponded. Thus, a letter from Blind dated 23 May 1889 indicated that she sent him *The Heather on Fire*, which received a ‘warm welcome’.²⁰¹ Furthermore, the same letter shows that Wallace had invited Blind to call on him: ‘you were kind enough to say you would be glad to see me any time I might be able to call’.²⁰² However, it is not clear whether they met in person prior to or after this invitation, since she was asking about the chance of calling on him soon, and there is no additional information to corroborate this visit.²⁰³ Wallace is also mentioned in Blind’s interview with *Hearth and Home*, in which she speaks of Wallace comparing her title poem to Tennyson’s *In Memoriam*. However, the interviewer does not specify the source or any other details regarding the statement, which makes it impossible to obtain additional context for this comparison. In addition to being acquainted with Wallace on a personal level, it is clear that Blind was aware of his work on evolution as she refers to it in her lecture on Shelley and Darwin, but again none of the consulted sources provides one with any additional opinions on his work and how much of his theory Blind was familiar with. Bearing in mind that the rest of the material in the lecture is based heavily on Darwin’s theories it is likely that these were her primary source of evolutionary thought.

However, Wallace’s account of Blind’s volume might shed light on whether or not Blind implemented some of his ideas in her poetry. In his preface to the reprint of *AoM*, Wallace argues that Blind’s treatment of the subject was ‘not altogether satisfactory [yet it is] doubtful whether any living writer could treat it in a manner and with a power

²⁰¹ Ms Add 4641, f. 92.

²⁰² Ibid., f. 92.

²⁰³ Ibid., f. 92.

fully worthy of the theme'.²⁰⁴ He further comments on the work by providing a summary of the poem and extensively quoting a number of passages. The most important parts of the preface are arguably the following two observations: 'She appears to have taken her main inspiration from Darwin's "Descent of Man," and she anticipated Professor Drummond both as to his title and in some of his main conceptions.'²⁰⁵ The portion of the comment referring to Drummond can be discarded since, as will be demonstrated in the next chapter, Blind was rather displeased with him for using the same title for his work, and Ludwig Mond tried to dissuade Wallace from including the Drummond reference in his introduction.²⁰⁶ However, Wallace's mention of Darwin's *Descent* as the 'main inspiration' for the title poem disagrees with the argument in this section.²⁰⁷ While *Descent* undoubtedly played its role in the creation of *AoM*, it is *Origin* and Blind's reaction to it, as demonstrated in this section, that are crucial for our comprehension of the poem. It is difficult to establish the reason why he named only *Descent* as Blind's inspiration and never mentions *Origin*, but one may assume that it had to do with the title of the volume/poem rather than the contents, as it was demonstrated above that Blind was strongly influenced by the latter volume.

In the introduction Wallace quotes extensively from the second canto of 'Chaunts' such as lines 7-18 which describe the creation of life, lines 97-100 where the first human arrives, and the last stanza of the first canto, lines 121-126, which focuses on the first tools and skills developed by people. He uses these lines to exemplify the first part of 'AoM', which, he argues is the most important of the three as it 'deals with physical and

²⁰⁴ Alfred Russel Wallace, 'Introductory Note', *The Ascent of Man* (London: T. F. Unwin, 1899), pp. v-xii, p. v.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. vi.

²⁰⁶ See p. 127, n. 181 for Mond's letter.

²⁰⁷ There is not enough evidence to indicate that Blind studied Wallace's theories in detail and, if she did, which works she paused on.

mental evolution.’²⁰⁸ Wallace does not pay a lot of attention to the second part and continues to quote extensively from ‘The Leading of Sorrow’, which in its ‘pessimistic view of the pain and misery’ is, in Wallace’s view, ‘entirely opposed to that of Darwin and the present writer’.²⁰⁹ As Peter Bowler notes, Wallace ‘insisted that animals do not feel pain as we do, so there was no need to see nature as harsh and cruel because the unfit had to be eliminated’.²¹⁰ As demonstrated over the course of this chapter, it was precisely this struggle for survival with all its facets that produced such a profound effect on Blind and moved her to create the poem.

The last moment that needs to be explored in this section is an alternative interpretation of the narrative of ‘AoM’, which is connected to the title, and may be less obvious to a twenty-first-century reader than to a nineteenth-century one. The key element in this connection is the word ‘ascent’ and can be seen as an allusion to the resurrection and ascension of Christ and to a soul’s moving heavenwards after death. Using the prelude to ‘AoM’, ‘Wings’, as an example one observes that, in its entirety, it speaks of the ascension of a soul to heaven with Blind using imagery typical for such an action, including wings and birds: ‘Ascend, oh my Soul, with the wings of the lark ascend! / Soaring away and away far into the blue’ (‘Wings’, ll.1-2).²¹¹ Furthermore, according to *The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols*, ‘the level of ascension ... corresponds to the level of the inner life and the degree to which the spirit has transcended the material plane of existence’.²¹² Considering that the phrase ‘far into the blue’ from the second line

²⁰⁸ Wallace, p. vi.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., p. ix.

²¹⁰ Peter J. Bowler, *Darwin Deleted: Imagining a World Without Darwin*. (London and Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013) p. 65

²¹¹ It is worth mentioning that the act of ascension is supported by caesurae, which mimic the upwards movement.

²¹² Jean Chevalier, Alain Gheerbrant, John Buchanan-Brown, transl., ‘Ascension’, *The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols*, (London: Penguin Books, 1996), p. 48.

represents heaven, it seems likely that Blind is preparing her readers for the narrative of transcendence where the familiar elements of Christianity, known to most of her readers, are infused with a newer theory that potentially supersedes the well-known structure.

One of these elements of substitution is the replacement of the traditional Christian deity system with the figure of Love that expresses the duality consisting of the material world, which lives according to evolutionary laws and the struggle for survival (thus the need for substitution), and a world that still requires a presence of a deity to explain the gaps in existing knowledge. This duality can be seen in the narrative created for Love, especially in the second and third parts of the poem where some parallels to the Bible can be observed. Here, Love is given anthropomorphic characteristics, which in some places deviate from the more typical depiction of a child deity, and especially in the second and third parts of the poem can be compared to the figure of Jesus Christ assuming the role of a hero-saviour of humanity. This is especially prominent in ‘The Leading of Sorrow’, which opens with the death of Love — ‘Since Love, even Love, is mortal’ (l.15, p. 86) — and ends with its resurrection and possible ascension at the end of the poem. However, even if Love has other characteristics connected with the moral element of society, the parallels between it and Jesus end here, as Blind utilises Christian imagery and language to describe a belief in the progressive development of humanity.²¹³

Considering that there are two possibilities to read ‘AoM’ – through Darwinian theories and, as just demonstrated, by using ideas pertaining to Christianity. These points of view on the first glance seem to be completely incompatible; however, considering a certain level of agnosticism rather than atheism present in *Origin*, the cohabitation of

²¹³ See the chapter on Mazzini for a larger discussion on Blind’s perception of religion and *AoM*.

Christian and evolutionary thoughts in one mind and one text is not impossible. Another element that plays a considerable part in creating a combination of these ideas is Mazzini's optimism. Considering that Mazzini's effect on Blind goes back to her girlhood and affected her perception of science and religion it is not surprising that all of these elements converge in Blind's poetry. This is especially true as the idea for 'AoM' came to Blind while listening to Mazzini's speeches.

1.5 Conclusion

This chapter set out to explore the intellectual contexts of *AoM* by examining the key people and works that influenced the volume. Shelley was selected as he was Blind's poetic precursor and model, using the term 'precursor' not in its Bloomian sense but in the more extended sense suggested by Robert Douglas-Fairhurst. The inclusion of Mazzini and Darwin was determined by the value Blind assigns to their ideas and because their works exhibit a particular way of perceiving and reacting to the world that can be defined through the concept of 'Victorian sage'. The manner in which these thinkers and authors were approached here is based on a comment Blind made in Eliot's biography; there she muses on the usefulness of reading not only the writer's novels or poems but also her essays as 'they let out opinions, views, judgements of things and authors, which we should never otherwise have known'.²¹⁴ Hence the main way this chapter approaches the connection between the ideas of the aforementioned intellectuals and *AoM* is through Blind's own writings on them. This method of exploring influences on the volume allows

²¹⁴ Blind, *Eliot*, p. 62.

us to establish the ideas to which Blind ascribed the highest value and also helps us to discover previously unnoticed connections between ideas.

Comparing the ways in which Blind and *AoM* were influenced by the aforementioned thinkers on the current theories of influence explored in the introduction to this chapter, one observes that other people's effect on Blind does not fit into the schemes outlined by the more typical concepts of influence mentioned above. However, all of them are more comparable to the list of the possible interactions presented in Douglas-Fairhurst's book. Thus, this chapter demonstrated that influence, as a concept describing the interaction between a poet and her/his predecessors, is not limited to the discussions of the effects of poetic foremothers and forefathers, but encompasses a variety of interactions such as mentoring or being a role model, with these functions fulfilled by people who are not necessarily poets themselves. What is more, when speaking about the possible influences on a poet's work we should also look at the elements that affected his or her perception of the world, as discussed in the section that speaks of Darwin's effect on Blind, because these, in turn, modify the way in which the poet perceives his or her predecessors, as exemplified by Blind's attitude to Shelley. Another important aspect of this approach is that it broadens our comprehension of a poet's work and illuminates important intellectual connections which were previously unnoticed; Mazzini's effect on Blind's understanding of Eliot is a case in point.

One unifying factor can be seen in the concept of the 'Victorian Sage'. According to John Holloway, this term typically refers to a writer of fiction or non-fiction who possesses 'a distinctive method' and aims 'to express notions about the world, man's situation in it, and how he should live' thus projecting a certain "outlook on life" that has

philosophical and moral features.²¹⁵ Another definition of the term can be seen in George P. Landow's essay 'Elegant Jeremiahs', where a sage is presented as an 'interpreter who can read the signs of times', who employs an 'unusual perspective' to comment on the event together with being a 'reliable interpreter'.²¹⁶ This type of thinker also interacts in a particular way with their readers, as Morgan argues: a sage narrative represents 'a dialogue between a speaker –the sage – and a contemporaneous audience'.²¹⁷ What is more, according to Landow's essay 'Aggressive (Re)interpretations of the Female Sage *Florence Nightingale's* Cassandra' one can identify a certain structure in sage writing. The main points in the structure go as follows: firstly, a sage presents a critique of the present state of society, which is followed by a warning to 'his contemporaries of coming disaster if they pursue their present course' and, in the end, 'the sage offers the audience a vision of future bliss if it returns to the ways it has forgotten'.²¹⁸

Speaking of the 'sage' tradition we also have to consider Blind's place within it. Landow opens the aforementioned essay by questioning whether there are 'any female Victorian sages,' and 'what accommodation does a woman have to make to employ – and appropriate – sage writing?'²¹⁹ One of the ways he is answering this question is through exploring Nightingale's *Cassandra* according to the structure outlined above through which Landow arrives at the conclusion that even if there were women participating in this mode of writing, it came with several inherent issues such as having a 'public self in

²¹⁵ John Holloway, *The Victorian Sage: Studies in Argument* (London: Macmillan, 1953), p. 1.

The original list of sages includes Carlyle, Disraeli, Eliot, Newman, Arnold and Hardy.

²¹⁶ George P. Landow, 'Elegant Jeremiahs', in *Victorian Perspectives: Six Essays*, ed. John Clubbe, Jerome Meckier (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1989), pp. 21-41, pp. 22, 27.

²¹⁷ Thaïs E. Morgan, 'Victorian Sage Discourse and the Feminine: An Introduction', in *Victorian Sages and Cultural Discourse: Renegotiating Gender and Power*, Thaïs E. Morgan (ed) (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1990), p. 3.

²¹⁸ Landow, 'Aggressive (Re)interpretations of the Female Sage *Florence Nightingale's* Cassandra', in *Victorian Sages and Cultural Discourse: Renegotiating Gender and Power*, Thaïs E. Morgan (ed) (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1990), p. 34.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 32, 33.

an age when woman was not supposed to have' it and the genre's religious associations.²²⁰

By subjecting 'AoM' to the same model as Landow did with *Cassandra* we observe that it follows a similar pattern. For example, in illustrating the history of human kind, 'Chaunts of Life' also expounds the origin of the present-day state of society, thus fulfilling the first of Landow's criteria. The second and third parts of the poem answer the other two principles by depicting potential negative outcomes in the situation when the current course of development persists and, finally, with the rebirth of Love signifies 'a vision of future bliss'. Blind's use of a sage-like structure in her poem, its themes as well as not eschewing potential association with religious themes suggest that she her work can be seen as aiming to fit in the same intellectual space as the thinkers that influenced her.

²²⁰ Ibid., 44.

Chapter 2: Composition and Production of *The Ascent of Man*

After examining the main sources and ideas behind *The Ascent of Man*, this thesis now turns its attention to the history of the composition and publication of the volume itself, from the moment of the inception of some of its poems until the time when the finished volume left the binders and landed in the reviewers' hands. As is the case for many 'recovered' writers, very little work has been done on the material history of Blind's work. Knowing more about the stages of a volume's life and connecting them with the material presented in the previous section not only helps us develop a better comprehension of the poems from *AoM*, but also aids the overall understanding of Blind's work, her position in the literary society of her time, and the significance of the volume in her poetic career. Furthermore, the material presented will increase the corpus of knowledge on literary production practices in the late nineteenth century. Consequently, this chapter will heavily draw on archival sources to elucidate the fact-based part of *AoM*'s history.

Each of the sections explores a particular element of the volume's production. The first one attempts to establish the composition timeline for the volume, while the one which follows focuses on the role played by one of Blind's closest friends in developing the published version of *AoM*. The letters that form the base for this discussion contain a number of details that elucidate Blind's approach to the composition process and get us as close as possible to a manuscript of *AoM*. Following this, the last section of this chapter centres on the aspects relating to the publication, production and advertising of *AoM*. It is predominantly based on material found in the ledgers of Blind's publisher, Chatto & Windus, which contain the records covering sales of the volume, the number of copies printed, Blind's ideas on how the volume should look and how much it should cost, and some details of the advertising process. As the archival information on *AoM* is not

complete, it will be supplemented by the data on some of Blind's later volumes to help establish a more complete picture of practices connected to the publication of Blind's work.

2.1. Timeline

One of the first things to establish in respect of *AoM* is the timeline of composition as it will lead to better comprehension of how this volume fits into Blind's life as well as which events could have affected the poems. In this regard Blind's commonplace book is of great value. Although it might at first glance appear irrelevant, as the entries start in 1892, three years after the publication of *AoM*, there is at the very end of the book a list which consists of seven poems included in the volume with dates and places written next to them:

The Afterglow Cimiez — 14 Dec. 1887
On the Lighthouse at Antibes — Cimiez. 15Dec -
Veuce-Cagnes — Cimiez. 1 Dec -
Motherhood — Cimiez. 7 May 1886
Heartsease — Paris 25 June 1888
Ah if you Knew — 24 June –
The Pilgrim Soul — 22 Sept 1888¹

Looking at *AoM*'s table of contents one observes that these poems are from all three parts of the volume: 'Motherhood' and 'The Pilgrim Soul' are from the second part of the title poem; 'On the Lighthouse at Antibes' and 'Veuce-Cagnes' can be found in 'PoA'; and the other three poems belong to 'Love in Exile'.² Considering that there is no additional

¹ A photograph of the list can be found in the appendix 2.

² The final title for 'Veuce-Cagnes' is 'Cagnes'.

information about this list, there are several possibilities as to what its contents can refer to. Firstly, the dates and places might relate to the times when Blind either started or finished working on each of the poems; secondly, they can denote when and where she was first inspired to compose the texts, or, lastly, they might refer to other memorable facts connected with the work in question.

With the help of additional information, concerning two of the poems from this list, one can narrow the available options. One of the sources that allow us to do so is a letter from Blind to Garnett of 26 November 1887.³ Comparing the place where this letter was written, 'Cimiez pres Nice', to the list we can see that the first four poems have the same location next to their names. What is more, the places in the titles of the third and fourth poems on the list, 'Antibes' and 'Cagnes', are situated close to Cimiez on the French Riviera.⁴ Similarly, there is a temporal proximity between the letter and the list: the date recorded for 'Veuce-Cagnes' is five days after the one in the letter, and the one that corresponds to 'On the Lighthouse at Antibes' on the list is just two weeks after the letter. What is more, the contents of the letter, which will be discussed later, suggest that the dates on the list relate to the time when the poems were completed. Furthermore, as 'Pilgrim Soul' is one of the longer parts of *AoM*, it is unlikely that the date next to it refers to the time when Blind started to compose it.

Blind's commonplace book is not the only source that is helpful in establishing an approximate time frame for the composition. One of the others is a letter by Blind's friend and literary executor, Arthur Symons (1865-1945), to Katharine Bradley (1846-

³ See pp. 146-5 for the description of the poem and the following sub-section for a detailed discussion of Blind's relationship with Garnett.

⁴Add Ms 61929, f. 23.

1914), one-half of Michael Field. Of particular interest is Symons' mention of reading a manuscript of 'AoM' as well as his opinion on the poem:

I had a strong desire to show you — but did not dare do that without permission— a poem by Miss Mathilde Blind that I have read in MS the other day. It is to be called "The Ascent of Man"; really, some of the city scenes were of an amazing vividness & through all [illeg.] of womanly sympathy which brings the tear to one's eyes sometimes. If it is all up to the level I have seen, the book must succeed when it is published. [Underlining Symons's]⁵

In addition to presenting one of the earliest opinions expressed about the poem, the letter also suggests that a substantial part of it might have been composed by 1888, when the letter was written, as it is likely that Symons refers to a substantial part of the poem.⁶ However, it is unclear how much of it Symons would have read, as there are several city scenes throughout the body of the text, especially in the second and third parts of 'AoM', and the letter does not indicate to which city scenes Symons is referring. An example of a city scene is located at the beginning of 'The Pilgrim Soul' and, among other themes, addresses the 'condition of England'; Blind depicts the city as a chaotic space riddled with vice. The lines quoted below are a part of the lengthy passage containing a number of city scenes set in the present:

Lost lives of great cities bespattered and tumbled,
Black rags the rain soaks, the wind whips like a knout,
Were crouched in the streets there, and o'er them nigh stumbled

A swarm of light maids as they tripped to some rout.
(*'The Pilgrim Soul'*, ll. 40-3, pp. 66)

Here Blind draws her reader's attention to those who are cast aside in the past and present in the constant battle for gold described in the previous stanzas as well as questioning the

⁵ Add Ms 46867, ff. 214-5.

This letter does not include time references other than the year it was written. What is more, Michael Field's journal *Work and Days* does not provide any additional material on *AoM*.

⁶ The letter can be dated only by the year and there are not mentions in its body, which could help to narrow the time span that it was written in.

direction of humankind's development. Blind also includes the contrast between the partygoers clad in silky raiment (l. 44) with the darkness and decay of the surrounding city. Another element that stands out from these lines is the near encounter between the darkness of the past and present and those who are blind to the situation and thus perpetuate it.

Another way to establish *AoM*'s timeline is to ascertain if any of the poems were published before 1889. The first poem, 'Time's Shadow', was published as early as 1882 in Hall Caine's anthology *Sonnets of Three Centuries*.⁷ In Caine's volume, which aims to be an authoritative account of the sonnet's history, Blind's work appears alongside such authors as Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Leigh Hunt and Percy Bysshe Shelley. Comparing the two poems we observe that there are no substantial differences between the 1882 and 1889 versions. Among the changes made to the sonnet we can count the end-line punctuation as well as several changes to the wording of the poem. In the fifth line, 'Lo, there thy Past's forsaken Paradise' the word 'forsaken' originally was 'forfeited' and in the seventh line, 'While glimmering faint, the Future's promised land' 'faint' became the substitute for 'yon'. Also there was a difference in capitalisation: in the earlier version in the tenth line 'And Joy now gleams before, now in our rear' the word 'joy' was not capitalised. These alterations show that till the moment of publication Blind was fine-tuning her work and that she paid a considerable amount of attention to the meaning behind the words.

Five years later in 1887, three more poems that later became a part of *AoM* were published in Elizabeth Sharp's *Women's Voices. An Anthology of the most Characteristic*

⁷ The volume also includes a previously published sonnet, 'The Dead', which was originally included in the *St Oran* (1881).

Poems by English, Scotch, and Irish Women. Sharp's collection intends to present an account of female poetic heritage, starting with such poems as Lady Elizabeth Carew's 'Revenge' and Aphra Behn's 'A Song', and ending with Mary C. Gillington's 'Atlantis' and 'The Homecoming' and Alice E. Gillington's 'A West-County Love-Song'. Six of Blind's poems were selected for the anthology; three from the previously published *St Oran*: 'Love-Trilogy', 'The Dead', and 'The Street-Children's Dance', and three to be published in *AoM*: 'Wings', the prelude to 'AoM'; 'Nirvana', the penultimate sonnet of the second part of the title poem; and 'The Sower', that belongs to 'PoA'.⁸ In all cases, the earlier versions do not differ too much from the ones published in 1889. This can be demonstrated by using the prelude to 'AoM', 'Wings', as an example. In the earlier version at the end of the second line 'Soaring away and away far into the blue' the last word 'blue' was capitalised or the 'organ-blasts' in the seventh line 'Striking wild organ-blasts from the forest trees' were written as 'organ blasts'; and there were some minor discrepancies in punctuations. In regard to the word substitutions, there is only one instance in the fifteenth line 'Far into vistas empyreal receding from time'; the word 'empyreal' was in the earlier version 'auroral' allowing for a wider spectrum of interpretation.

A further source that can possibly help clarify the temporal framework of the volume is the title of two sonnets from 'PoA', 'Red Sunsets, 1883'. It is more than likely that these sonnets were inspired by a natural cataclysm, the Krakatoa sunsets, caused by

⁸ This is not the only anthology edited by Elizabeth Sharp that includes Blind's poems. The other two are *Women Poets of the Victorian Era*, (London: Walter Scott, 1890) that includes 'Chants [sic] of Life', 'The Dead', 'The Reapers', 'Love's Completeness', 'L'Envoy [sic]'. In respect of 'Cahunts of Life', Sharp printed the second canto of the poem is printed as number one as well as there is a discrepancy in punctuation in three places, which can be deemed as accidental.

The other one is *Songs and poems of the sea. (Sea-music.)* (London: Walter Scott, 1888) – 'Cleave Thou the Waves', 'Return of the Fishing Fleet. From *The Heather of Fire*', 'The Storm' which is a passage from *The Heather of Fire* as well as an extract from 'St Oran'.

the eruption of the volcano Krakatoa in 1883, located between Java and Sumatra. The resulting bright red and orange sunsets captivated the imaginations of many to such a degree that a special committee was created in Britain with the purpose of gathering descriptions of the eruption ‘in such form as shall best provide preservation and promote their usefulness’.⁹

Amongst the gathered accounts of particular interest are Gerard Manley Hopkins’s observations, which he recorded while at Stonyhurst College:

Four colours in particular have been noticeable, orange lowest and nearest the sundown; above this and broader, green; above this, and broader still, a variable red, ending in being crimson; above this, a faint lilac. The lilac disappears, the green deepens, spreads, and encroaches on the orange, and the red deepens, spreads, and encroaches on the green, till at last one red, varying downwards from crimson to scarlet or orange, fills the west and south.¹⁰

Comparing this passage with Blind’s poems one observes the presence of similar colours in the first of her sonnets:

A pure expanse of rose-flushed violet glowed
And, kindling into crimson light, o’erflowed
The hurrying wrack with such a blood-red glare,
That heaven, igniting, wildly seemed to flare
On the dazed eyes of many an awe-struck crowd.
(‘The Red Sunsets, 1883’, p. 154, ll.4-8)¹¹

Elsewhere in these sonnets Blind used various shades of red, as well as lilac, to describe her sunsets; the same colours were also observed and recorded by other correspondents of the Krakatoa Committee. Blind’s second sonnet connected with the sunsets describes

⁹ G.J. Symons, ‘Prefatory and Historical’, in *The Eruption of Krakatoa, and Subsequent Phenomena: Report of the Krakatoa Committee of the Royal Society*, Royal Society. Krakatoa Committee, G. J. Symons (ed), Ralph Abercromby, Douglas E. Archibald et al., (London: Trübner & Co, 1888), pp. iii-vi p. iii.

¹⁰ Gerard Hopkins, [no title], in *The Eruption of Krakatoa, and Subsequent Phenomena*, p. 172 only.

¹¹ As there are no other ways to concisely separate the two sonnets, I will use page numbers to indicate which one is referred to.

the evening haze that was another prominent feature of the green coloured sky (see lines three and eight below).

By invoking the colours and the date associated with the Krakatoa sunsets both sonnets feed into the end-of-the-world feeling that was prevalent during the fin de siècle. As determined in the previous chapter, one of the themes present in *AoM* is not only human history but also the possible direction of the future development of the human race.¹² In respect of the latter, *Blind*'s exploration of the theme feeds into the zeitgeist as the idea of a potential negative development reverberated through society; we can find similar concerns in such works as Cesare Lombroso's *The Criminal Man* (1876) or Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Grey* (1890). Indeed, this issue together with the questions of 'time and causality ... trouble[d] ... many writers' of the time.¹³ *Blind* feeds into this mood by using Biblical allusions, which are especially prominent in the sonnet on p. 155:

THE twilight heavens are flushed with gathering light,
And o'er wet roofs and huddling streets below
Hang with a strange Apocalyptic glow
On the black fringes of the wintry night.
Such bursts of glory may have rapt the sight
Of him to whom on Patmos long ago
The visionary angel came to show
That heavenly city built of chrysolite.
(*'The Red Sunsets, 1883'*, p. 155, ll. 1-8)

Lines six and seven refer to Revelation 1:9 'I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.'¹⁴

¹² Also see note 147 in the previous chapter

¹³ Caroline Blyth, 'Introduction', *Decadent Verse: An Anthology of Late Victorian Poetry, 1872-1900*, ed. Caroline Blyth (New York: Anthem Press, 2009), pp. 1-48, p. 2.
Also see Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst, *The Fin De Siècle: A Reader in Cultural History, C. 1880-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) for the exploration of these themes.

¹⁴ Revelations, 1:9.

Another instance is present in lines seven and eight, where an angel shows ‘the city built of chrysolite’.¹⁵ This and the preceding line reflect verse 21:10: ‘and he [an angel] carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God’, and drawing on the description of the city from verses 21:19 and 20: ‘And the foundations of the wall of the city *were* garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation *was* jasper [...] the sevens, chrysolite’.¹⁶ The last two lines, with their vision of an ideal place, a place of hope, New Jerusalem, signify a twist in the sonnet, after which it moves on to describe the oppressed workers (‘three factory hands begrimed with soot’ l. 9) who are ‘starved of earth's beauty by Man's grudging hand’ (l. 12) admiring the sunsets, having been given a rare chance to enjoy nature (‘may feast in Nature's fairyland’, l. 14). Blind's sestet, therefore, explores the accessibility of nature and its universal appeal, which, as the sonnet argues, is available even to those who are deprived of other things (see ll. 12-14).

The above demonstrates that the sunsets and, possibly, accounts like the one written by Hopkins, were one of the main sources of inspiration for Blind's sonnets, which would put the composition date for the sonnets between 1883 and somewhere in 1888/9. The contribution of Blind and other female authors to the literature on the aftermath of the Krakatoa explosion has long been overlooked. An essay by Richard Altick, entitled ‘Four Victorian Poets and an Exploding Island’, identifies three more authors in addition to Hopkins whose work incorporated references to the sunsets: Alfred Lord Tennyson, Robert Bridges and Algernon Charles Swinburne. Similarly, a 2012 essay by Richard Hamblyn that speaks of the sunsets and their representation in literature

¹⁵ From 1790 the word “chrysolite” was used to refer to the precious olivine, a silicate of magnesia and iron found in lava, the colour of which varies from pale yellowish-green (the precious stone) to dark bottle-green. As the result, the line can be seen as referring not only to the green sunsets but also to the volcanic explosion.

¹⁶ Ibid., 21:10, 19 and 20. The italics are present in the Bible.

and art does not mention any women authors or artists whose work refers to the cataclysm.¹⁷ These absences demonstrate the lack of attention to women's works throughout most of the twentieth century and more recently, in spite of the recovery of a number of notable female poets.

The material presented above demonstrates that several of the poems included in *AoM* were composed throughout the 1880s, with the process of composition most likely to have been completed by the second half of 1888, as the date next to 'Pilgrim Soul' suggests. According to the material explored above, the poems can be arranged in the following order:

- composed in or before 1882 — 'Time's Shadow'
- 7 May 1886 — 'Motherhood'
- in or before 1887 — 'Wings', 'Nirwana' and 'The Sower'
- 1 December 1887 — 'Cagnes'
- 14 December 1887 — 'The Afterglow'
- 15 December 1887 — 'On the Lighthouse at Antibes'
- 24 June 1888 — 'As if you Knew'
- 25 June 1888 — 'Heartsease'
- 22 September 1888 — 'Pilgrim Soul'
- between 1883 and 1888 — both 'Red Sunsets, 1883'.¹⁸

There are, however, two remarks that should be made here. Firstly, there is a chance that not all of the poems were intended for *AoM*. As none of the available materials provide an insight into the way the volume was assembled, and knowing that Blind published a collection of poetry (*The Prophecy of St Oran*, 1881) and a long poem (*The Heather on*

¹⁷ Richard Hamblyn, 'The Krakatoa Sunsets', *The Public Domain Review*, <http://publicdomainreview.org/2012/05/28/the-krakatoa-sunsets/> (accessed on 10/12/16).

¹⁸ As there is no evidence of when exactly 'Time's Shadow' was first penned, it is impossible to present a more precise date to mark the start of the composition process.

Fire, 1886) within the timeline presented above it is possible that some of the poems might have been intended for the first one or even could have been a part of the second poem. The second observation relates to the future of the volume/title poem; it is based on a remark from Blind's interview with the *Women's Penny Paper* published on 14 June 1890, a year and a month after the appearance of the volume. Blind mentions that she had been working on the poem for a considerable amount of time and that, as yet, it was not completed: 'the chief work of my life up to the present time is my poem *The Ascent of Man*, at which I have been writing for many years and which indeed is not finished yet'.¹⁹ Based on this statement alone, one can presume that she wanted at least the title poem to become an organically developing work, not unlike Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, which she admired. However, as there are no further manuscripts, corrections or mentions of this in the available archival material it is not possible to provide any additional evidence for this theory. Indeed, according to Symons's preface to Blind's *Poetical Works* no alterations or new poems were found among her papers, and the only alterations to texts that were made were to the 'Prophecy of St. Oran', for which a volume was found with corrections in her own handwriting.²⁰ Therefore, one can presume that Blind's statement to the interviewer was either indicative of her future plans or, if it was true, that a manuscript was lost or destroyed.

¹⁹Anon., 'Interview. Miss Mathilde Blind', *Women's Penny Paper*, 14 June 1890, 397-8, 397.

The periodical interviewed Blind in the connection with the publication of her translation of Marie Bashkirtseff's *Journal* that also included a short biography of Bashkirtseff written by Blind. (Bashkirtseff, Marie (1858-84) Russian borne painter who lived most of her life in France and Italy and whose diary, published posthumously, was quite a sensation). It is also interesting to note that, as P. J. Keating notes, '[t]he monthly and weekly illustrated periodicals ... drew attention not only to the opinions of popular and temporarily fashionable authors, but also to their homes, habits, looks and personal habits'. He comments that this type of interview came from America and was often accompanied with a photograph. (See P. J. Keating, *The Haunted Study, a Social History of the English Novel, 1875-1914*, Faber & Faber, 2012, e-book, Google play edition, p. 63) Thus it is likely that both interviews with Blind mentioned in the thesis belong to the same type of interviews.

²⁰ Arthur Symons, 'Preface', *Works*, p. vii-viii.

2.2. Composition

An important element of *AoM*'s history is connected with a group of people who supported Blind in her personal and professional lives: Charles Rowley, Ford Madox Brown, William Michael Rossetti, Giuseppe Mazzini, William Sharp, Ludwig Mond and Richard Garnett.²¹ Ford Madox Brown, according to Angela Thirlwell, championed Blind's poetry and tried to persuade Dante Gabriel Rossetti to look at some of her work.²² Charles Rowley's letters, especially those written during the last year of Blind's life, reveal that he offered her a substantial degree of emotional support.²³ Ludwig Mond organised the 1899 reprint of the volume, as well as its introduction by Alfred Russel Wallace.²⁴ William Michael Rossetti read Blind's work as is demonstrated by a letter Blind addressed to him correcting his suggestion that the word 'Duan' came into the language through the work of Dickens. Blind states that she 'took it from Burns who [...] uses the word [...] in his Scotch dialect poems'.²⁵ This observation, the manner of address ('Dear William') and the fact that Blind was comfortable enough to show Rossetti her poetry and discuss it in detail suggest that not only were they friends but also that they were on an equal footing in their discussion of literature.²⁶

²¹ Mazzini's influence was explored in detail in the first section of the previous chapter.

²² See Thirlwell, pp. 206 -207.

²³ HRC, Richard Garnett Collection, MS-1545, Container 10.6.

²⁴ Wallace, Alfred Russel (1823–1913), naturalist, evolutionary theorist and social critic. See p.000 for more details.

²⁵ W. M. Rossetti: Another interesting point is the connection between WMR and MB. Letter from DGR to his mother from the eleventh of August 1871: "the Browns, as you probably know, went for a month to Lynmouth, but are now returned to Fitzroy Square. With them went Hueffer, and William's favorite Miss Mathilde Blind, who by lucky accident unearthed there some old woman who had known Shelley and his first wife Harriet ... all of which Miss Blind has written in a letter to William" (<http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/pr5246.a43.vol2.rad.html>; accessed on 03/07/2012) [underlining mine]

Burns: Burns uses this term in, for example, "The Vision". According to a note in a Harvard Classics edition of Burns "duan a term of Ossian's for the different divisions of a digressive poem. See his Cath-Loda, vol. 2 of M'Pherson's translation". The note was written by Burns himself. According to the OED duan originates from Gaelic and means 'poem, canto, song. First used in English in Macpherson's *Ossian*, 1765'.

²⁶ The date on the letter as well as the word in question relate it to Blind's poem *The Heather on Fire* (1886).

Some of these friendships, Diedrick suggests, might have developed as a result of Blind's essay on Percy Bysshe Shelley, published in the *Westminster Review* in July 1870. As a result of its publication: '[she] earned [...] the respect of men like Garnett, William Michael Rossetti, William Morris, Swinburne, Athenaeum editor Norman MacColl, and the German-born painter Ford Madox Brown, who became a life-long champion of her poetry.'²⁷ However, comparing the date when Blind's article was published, July 1870, the dates provided by the Blind-Garnett correspondence, which will be explored shortly, and the material included in the section on Shelley it is evident that Garnett's respect at least was earned prior to the publication of the article.²⁸

Of Blind's friendships mentioned above, the one with Richard Garnett (1835-1906) deserves particular attention as it not only lasted through a considerable part of her life, but it also had a considerable impact on Blind's work, including *AoM*. Garnett is mostly known in connection with the British Museum (now British Library) where he worked for most of his life in different posts, following in the footsteps of his father, also Richard Garnett (1789-1850) a philologist who in 1838 became assistant keeper of printed books at the British Museum.²⁹ The younger Richard Garnett started his career at the library in 1851 and, as Alan Bell and Barbara McCrimmon observe, quickly progressed to higher positions. Apart from being a librarian Garnett wrote poetry and prose, championed Shelley's heritage and through his work at the British Museum came across a variety of writers; as Barbara McCrimmon notes, 'from mid-century he was a part of the British

²⁷ James Diedrick 'A Pioneering Female Aesthete: Mathilde Blind in "The Dark Blue"', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 36-3 (2003), 210-41, 212.

The article in question is her essay on W. M. Rossetti's edition of Shelley in *Westminster Review*. It is also extensively discussed in the second chapter, section on Shelley's influence on Blind.

²⁸ See, for example, p. 99 for the details on Shelley's role in Blind and Garnett's friendship.

²⁹ Alan Bell, 'Garnett, Richard', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-33334?rskey=A4RfhH&result=1>, accessed on 20/11/2017.

literary, as well as library scene.’³⁰ However, while discussing the same decade McCrimmon also notes that ‘in 1859 he was twenty-four years old, a budding poet, enamoured of Shelley, and trying to establish a reputation in the British world of letters without the great advantage of a university education or an influential mentor.’³¹ The situation McCrimmon describes is quite similar to the one Blind was in about a decade or so later. What is more, it is likely that being familiar with the challenges of breaking through into literary society without having the right connections Garnett was helping out a younger generation of writers, such as Blind and others, mentioned by Susan David Bernstein in *Roomscape: Women Writers in the British Museum from George Eliot to Virginia Woolf*.³²

Speaking of Garnett’s own writings, his career in this field started with publication of translations from German and Spanish and in 1858 he anonymously published *Primula: a Book of Lyrics* that, according to Bell, was well received. Following this Garnett authored a number of biographies, including studies of John Milton and William Blake, several volumes of poetry, a collection of short stories and edited several poetry collections, including one that contained previously unpublished poems by Shelley. This multi-genre literary output of Garnett made him a valuable mentor figure for Blind, at least in the beginning of their friendship, and this side of their relationship can be seen in the advice on perseverance and potential change of genre that is presented on page 000.

Garnett, prominent librarian, poet and biographer, worked at the British Museum throughout the whole period he corresponded with Blind. Alan Bell, in his essay on

³⁰ Barbara Mac Crimmon, *Richard Garnett: The Scholar as Librarian* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1989), p. vii.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

³² See the next page for more information on Garnett’s mentoring poets.

Garnett for the ODNB, claims that the positions Garnett held at the Museum led to him acquiring ‘a body of bibliographical knowledge that made him a walking guide to the collections before an actual subject-index was published’.³³ In addition to this, the time he spent as a superintendent of the Library’s Reading Room ‘earned him an enduring reputation for helpfulness to readers’, which became ‘a standard for the future development of the post.’³⁴ In *Roomscape* Bernstein pauses on Garnett’s importance for a group of women authors, including Amy Levy, Mathilde Blind and A. Mary F. Robinson. Bernstein perceives Garnett’s relationship with these women in a similar way to this thesis: several memorials consulted by her ‘attest to Garnett’s capacity as an out-of-classroom teacher, and the Museum library as a hub for launching an alternative school that accommodated a variety of knowledge seekers’.³⁵ Another text that mentions the friendship between Blind and Garnett is Barbara McCrimmon’s *Richard Garnett: The Scholar as Librarian*. However, McCrimmon represents their relationship primarily in relation to Shelley rather than to their own literary outputs and research. Although McCrimmon and Bernstein provide some interesting contextual information in relation to Garnett, Blind and the importance of British Museum for female authors, neither author explores the correspondence between Blind and Garnett and consequently their friendship or their literary collaborations in greater detail.

As neither of the abovementioned works provides a satisfactory overview of the correspondence or collaboration between Blind and Garnett it is beneficial to give an overall impression of their friendship before exploring the letters that speak of *AoM*. Therefore, it is of use to include examples of letters that cover a wide range of themes.

³³ Alan Bell, ‘Richard Garnett’, *ODNB*, Accessed 06/07/2012.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Susan David Bernstein, *Roomscape: Women Writers in the British Museum from George Eliot to Virginia Woolf* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), p. 97.

For example, in their correspondence Blind and Garnett discussed the reception of her lectures; in his letter of 27 May 1870 Garnett includes summaries of reviews from the *Globe* and the *Illustrated News*.³⁶ Furthermore, the same letter illustrates that Garnett was aware of Blind's financial situation as he asks her about winding up her 'business affairs to-day, and [retiring] from the scene of a [illeg.] with a surplus'. Several more letters at the BL concern financial matters. For example, on 16 February 1887, Blind mentions that Garnett had enclosed a five pound note in an earlier letter. One has to note that it was not only Richard Garnett who knew of Blind's affairs but also his family; there is a letter from his son Robert to Blind that speaks about the costs of renting a house, £22.12.6, and mentions he was also in touch with a potential landlady.³⁷ Information such as this provides evidence that Blind was close not only to Richard Garnett but to his entire family.

The second significant aspect of the letters consists of professional guidance given by Garnett to Blind, which ranges from advice about where and how to publish to tips for dealing with publishers: 'I think you would do well to write a line to Provost and Co and tell them that you are making arrangements with a new publisher, and request them to take care of your sheets for the present'.³⁸ A further example of Garnett taking up the role of mentor, is present in the letter of 23 February 1885 where he attempts to make Blind see her career in a positive light, advising her to 'consider the substantial progress you have made ... which you may reflect upon with just pride'; he continues by giving an example of Blind's achievements, telling her that she has

³⁶ There is no mention of the subject in the letter but it is most likely the lecture mentioned by Diedrick.

³⁷ Letter from Robert Garnett to Blind: This is not the only time Blind interacted with Garnett's family. For example, there is a fragment of a letter from Garnett's other son, Edward Garnett, who writes to Blind because she is a fellow artist, 'I would not post such a letter to any businessman, but I feel safe with an artist!' (Add Ms 61929, f. 36). There also is a short note from Mrs. Garnett in the collection.

³⁸ See letter from 13/06/1870.

a high rank in three different branches, poetry, fiction and biography. In poetry and fiction you stand alone: i.e. you have made quite a distinctive place for yourself, and cannot be regarded as belonging to any school, or as the imitation of any other writer.³⁹

Furthermore, the same letter contains advice on the form Blind should be working in. In a pragmatic manner he argues that by choosing to produce novels over poetry she would improve her financial situation as well as her popularity, and the results would be more immediate than with the poetry. He goes on to suggest, 'if you feel a call to the poem, go with it by all means, but do not lose sight of the novel'.⁴⁰

The latter advice is especially interesting when establishing an additional context for Blind since, as Virginia Blain argues, 'money was a major factor in decisions about genre for Victorian women who wanted to write; publishing verse was not generally a money-spinning activity, certainly less so than fiction.'⁴¹ One of the reasons for publishing poetry, Blain argues, was an improved chance of marriage: 'there is ... evidence that putting out a nice feminine little volume of verse might well have been a drawcard, consciously intended or not, to prospective suitors.'⁴² It is highly unlikely that this would have been the motivation in Blind's case as even her first volume cannot be seen as an explicitly feminine collection due to its connections with radical politics: the volume is dedicated to Giuseppe Mazzini. Another point raised in this discussion is, as Elaine Showalter states, that 'Victorian critics agreed that if women were going to write at all they should write novels'.⁴³ She connects this with the perception of 'the novel as

³⁹ Add Ms 61929, ff. 6b-7.

⁴⁰ Ibid., ff. 7b-8.

It is interesting to note that Bernstein interprets the same passage as Garnett applauding Blind's achievements yet she does not address why Blind would need such a letter from a longstanding friend. The fact that Blind needed reassurance can be deduced from the part of the letter that contains practical advice.

⁴¹ Blain, 'Sexual Politics of the (Victorian) Closet; or, No Sex Please — We're Poets' in *Women's Poetry, Late Romantic to Late Victorian: Gender and Genre*, pp. 135-63, p. 144.

⁴² Ibid., p. 144.

⁴³ Elaine Showalter, 'The Double Critical Standard and the Feminine Novel' in *Feminism in Literature: A Gale Critical Companion*, ed. Jessica Bomarito and Jeffrey W. Hunter (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2005), vol. 2, pp. 177-87, p. 180.

an instrument that transformed feminine weaknesses into narrative strengths'.⁴⁴ This, as well as Blind's financial situation, which only improved late in her life, could have been one of the reasons why Garnett advised Blind to focus on novels.⁴⁵

A similarly friendly and professional tone is present in the letters where they exchange poetry advice, of which there are numerous examples. One of the earliest is Garnett's response to Blind's translation of the 'Lament for Euphorion' from Goethe's *Faust*, touching on its poetic quality.⁴⁶ Garnett describes the translation as excellent, faithful to the original, full of energy and spirit but in need of revision; he argues that all the lines should begin with trochees to keep the metrical effect of the original.⁴⁷ Another example can be seen in a letter from 17 December 1869 where Garnett states that he 'had read her song with pleasure' and perceived it as 'very fanciful and musical, really poetical and well adapted to the connection in which I understand it to occur'.⁴⁸ The letter does not contain more specific information pointing towards a specific poem, but judging by the time the letter was published it might have been the 'Song of Wili' published in 1870 in *The Dark Blue*.⁴⁹

In the letters above, Garnett's reaction to the poems is mostly positive, but this is not always the case. A good example is Blind's letter of 14 September 1894 with draft versions of the two poems from her final volume *Birds of Passage: Songs of Orient and Occident* (1895) 'Ann Hathaway's Cottage' and 'Ann Hathaway' and Garnett's reply, sent four days later.⁵⁰ Garnett praises the first of the two sonnets, 'Ann Hathaway's

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 80.

⁴⁵ A similar attitude can be seen when Garnett assists Blind with the research for her lectures or articles.

⁴⁶ Add Ms 61927, f 29, 29b.

⁴⁷ Blind was not the only one whose drafts Garnett read, he also looked at Michael Fields proofs Add Ms Add 46867, f. 14.

⁴⁸ Add Ms 61927, f. 39.

⁴⁹ Blind, 'The Song of Willi', *The Dark Blue* 1 (1871), 741-5.

⁵⁰ Add Ms 61929, Blind's letter: ff. 118-9, Garnett's f. 120b.

Cottage', saying that it is 'charming and perfect' and has a connection with the space; he does not 'think anything more Shakespearean could be written ... it is a gem, leave it alone'.⁵¹ However, the second poem, 'Ann Hathaway', prompted some criticism, with Garnett stating that it 'may perhaps be made as bright by much polish', and to propose a considerable number of corrections to achieve the desired effect. Both cases are an example of Blind following his suggestions. The first poem is printed as it appears in Blind's letter, and, comparing the draft and printed versions of the second one, it is apparent that the octave of this sonnet was substantially rewritten, leaving the sestet in place. The changes suggested by Garnett are mostly lexical -- not unlike his comments on *AoM*, as will be demonstrated below -- and the extent of the revision of the octave can be observed by comparing the beginning of the two versions: 'His Eve of Women, fresh and very fair / in morning glory met' (line 1 in the letter) and 'His Eve of Women! She, whose mortal lot / Was linked to an Immortal's unaware' (lines 1 and 2 in the published version).⁵²

Garnett also extensively commented on Blind's longer poems, as can be seen from the sheet of paper that consists of his notes on pre-publication version of the three duans of *The Heather on Fire*. The notes on the first duan cover stanzas 2, 4, 16, 19, 21, 23, 24, 25, 27 and 38. One of the issues addressed by Garnett's notes is Blind's use of comparisons: 'I do not like the comparison of Heaven to a harebell. We should never compare very great things with very little things'.⁵³ Comparing this to the version that appeared in print, 'But now as the new sunshine poured along / Heaven's hollow dome, till all its convex blue / Brimmed over as a harebell full of dew' one can see that Blind

⁵¹ Add Ms 61929, f. 120b.

⁵² Add Ms 61929, f.9.

Blind, 'Anne Hathaway', *Birds of Passage: Songs of Orient and Occident* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1895).

⁵³ Add Ms 61929, f. 15.

decided not to follow Garnett's advice on this occasion.⁵⁴ He made another (similarly pedantic) comment on stanza 25: 'Green-eyed cat. Not sufficiently distinctive, all cats have green eyes'.⁵⁵ In the final version of the poem the cat's eyes are still green, 'There on a step stroking her whiskers sat, / Sublimely tolerant, a green-eyed cat'.⁵⁶ Blind seems to have rejected the majority of Garnett's suggestions, in fact. The only two instances where Blind accepted them were most likely regarding misprints, and can both be found in stanza 23 of the first duan. Garnett writes 'perhaps darkling is a misprint for darting' [underlining Garnett's].⁵⁷ The printed line reads: 'While nimbly darting o'er the new-mown meadows'.⁵⁸ Based on the fact that the comments are brief and that Blind did not agree to most of them one can assume that Garnett was looking either at the final manuscript version of the poem or at the proof sheets. However, the absence of contextual information makes it difficult to establish to which stage of production these notes belong. As we have almost no knowledge about Blind's creative process, the information presented by these documents demonstrates Blind's confidence in her choice of themes, imagery and words. What is more, her decision not to adopt Garnett's suggestions presents one with a case where a female poet does not automatically conform to ideas expressed by a male figure of authority.

It is important to note that the letters provide solid evidence that Blind was not only on the receiving end of the advice. Indeed, there are several instances where Blind expressed her opinion on Garnett's work, which, arguably, is evidence of mutual respect between them as professional authors. For example, a letter of 11 March 1870 contains

⁵⁴ Blind, *Heather on Fire*, Duan 1, II, ll. 2-4.

⁵⁵ Add Ms 61929, f. 15.

⁵⁶ Blind, *Heather on Fire*, Duan 1, XXV, ll. 3-4.

⁵⁷ Add Ms 61929, f. 15.

⁵⁸ Blind, *Heather on Fire*, Duan 1, XXII, l. 7.

Blind's notes on the oriental settings of some unspecified poems as well as on their metre; she queried whether Garnett was writing enough of the 'blank verse that he manages so capitally'.⁵⁹ There were also moments when they have simply exchanged volumes between each other as can be seen from the following letter written between 17 October 1893 and 23 February 1894. In it Blind speaks of a volume of Garnett's poems she has received; however, being in mourning she 'is not in the mood for verse of any kind', so the letter does not contain anything beyond very general remarks on Garnett's book.⁶⁰

What is more, the letters provide evidence of more collaborative ventures. A letter of 18 April 1870 addressed to Garnett contains several remarks on his story 'Firefly'; here one can observe that Garnett is unwilling to accept Blind's corrections on the ending of the story as they would destroy its moral.⁶¹ The most important element of this letter, however, is that Garnett mentions the possibility that the story might be translated with the intention of eventual publication in Germany. He states that the translation should only go ahead if Blind thinks its publication would be beneficial to them both. The same letter also refers to another story that he planned for Blind to see once written out. Considering the date of the letter and Garnett's argument about the mutual benefit of the translation one can conclude that the professional part of the friendship was reciprocal and also demonstrates the respect between the two authors.

The above demonstrates a variety of professional interactions between Blind and Garnett, allowing one to see his comments on *AoM* as a part of a long-lasting professional relationship. Garnett's preserved notes on *AoM* cover only two parts of the volume,

⁵⁹ Add Ms 61927, f. 65.

⁶⁰ Add Ms 61929, f. 102.

It is likely that the mourning is for Ford Madox Brown who passed away in October 1893.

⁶¹ This letter presents an additional argument against Diedrick's perception of Blind-Garnett relationship.

‘AoM’ and ‘PoA’; however, based on the way Garnett approached Blind’s poetry in the examples above and the material that follows, it can be presumed that he would have approached ‘Love in Exile’ in a similar manner. There are also several issues with the material that need to be mentioned. Firstly, the page numbers provided by Garnett do not correspond to the 1889 volume, and some of the notes do not describe the lines in a way that enables one to determine their exact position in the volume, which makes it problematic to ascertain whether Blind followed his advice. However, the differences in page numbers between the version perused by Garnett and the published one is mostly consistent with the supposition that he was referring to proof sheets, as is supported by the first sentence of the first letter and the fact that the page difference between the pages indicated in the letters and the respective locations in the printed version of the volume is more or less constant. This allows one to presume that the sheets can be roughly dated between the second half of 1888 and first third of 1889.⁶² Secondly, similarly to the notes on *The Heather on Fire*, these letters are undated and do not provide additional context that potentially could have allowed one a better insight into the creation of *AoM*.

The first preserved letter concerns the first two parts of ‘AoM’:

The poetry in these new sheets is in general very fine, especially from page 42 onwards. I wish I had time to point out the beauties that have most struck me, but must be content with the more useful but less agreeable task of signalling what seem to me the faults. These are not of great importance, and nearly all arising from the difficulties of the metre. Nothing but the exigency of rhyme could have made you write two such poor lines as 4 and 6 on p. 37. “Murdered souls” on page 37 will never do; “holocaust” is only predicable of sacrifice by fire, and therefore not of the Saint Bartholomew; the only possible meaning of “stews” is a very unseemly one. If you cannot rewrite the stanza it will be best to cancel it; but it might pass until the revise comes. “Gritty” of p. 62 is another instance of the tyranny of the rhyme, “grimy” would have been the right word, but it is much easier to criticise than to amend! On p. 50 “swish?” is not a word to my taste; on the rest “velvet-footed” seems to require “lead” rather than “call”; and “peals” cannot “swing”; while “sphinx-like” is obscure, though one can guess the meaning. The whole paragraph, however is exceedingly beautiful, and continues so to the end, which

⁶² For time of publication see next section, p. 181.

I venture to think could be exceedingly improved by omitting the last four lines, and altering “And no more” into “now no more”. “The Pilgrim Soul” is also very fine; its great fault, I think, is superabundance of similes. I fear this cannot be altered, but I should make a great effort to get rid of “which outraged the air” on p. 60, and “brambles of June” on p. 61. I have corrected Delios on p. 45 with Delos, the only misprint I have found.⁶³

In the second letter, there are several notes on ‘AoM’, as well as comments on ‘The Sower’ and ‘The Music Lesson’. Garnett has a high opinion of the latter poem, and devotes considerable space to suggestions on how to make it ‘just perfect’:

My criticisms in these sheets will not, generally speaking, be very important. p. 65, l. 2. I should prefer “billows” to “breakers”. 67 l. 2,3 I don’t like the smoking angels nor “God-litten”. Last line [ineradicable?] scans badly, and is not a good epithet for “loss”. I would suggest “irredeemable”. 68. L.8. will not scan: “who needest”? p. 76, l. 9, 10: the trees cannot possibly be coeval with the stones. 78, l.13 Cracked is not a dignified word — rent? 79, l. 4 is atrociously feeble: in the next stanza the rhyme of the same words should be avoided if possible. 80, l. 6 the clover seems to belong to an earlier time of year, but perhaps I am mistaken. 84 l. 13 mizzling is appropriate to the rain, not to the roof. 101 l.7 & 8 the comparison of the leaf to the bird is not very happy: could “unheard” be brought in? I suppose this fine poem is inspired by Millet’s picture, and should be almost inclined to place the artist’s name in bracket’s after the title. 107, l. 4 has gorse any scent? I do not like “lambent” in the last line, but can suggest nothing better. “The Music Lesson” is the most beautiful lyric in the book so far, and deserves to be made just perfect. I do not understand “tricked” if it is a misprint for “trickled” this will not do, for trickling denotes smallness and feebleness. “Rang” or “pealed” would do; and I would insert “the” before “blossoming”. Apple-blossom is quite out of place, for thrushes do not build in apple-trees, and the blossom would, generally speaking be over by May. “The sweet blossom” “fragrant blossom”, “spray and blossom” “masking” or “veiling blossom” might pass, but none of them seems exactly the right thing.⁶⁴

This letter also has an additional comment written on the first page, which is not included in the letter’s main body and refers to ‘A Symbol’, penultimate poem from the first part of ‘AoM’; this states ‘the new sonnet is very good, I should prefer “impenetrable” to “insuperable” and “maintain” to “retain”’.⁶⁵

⁶³ Add Ms 61929, ff. 30-31b.

⁶⁴ Add Ms 61929, ff. 32-33b.

The picture Garnett refers to is most likely Jean-François Millet’s “The Sower” painted in 1865-66.

⁶⁵ Ibid., f. 32.

The third letter, also without a date, continues to explore 'PoA':

Most of the poems in new sheets are very beautiful, "The Teamster" the finest so far; and we cannot too highly praise "Apple-Gathering", "A Highland Village", "Autumn Sunset" and "Cagnes". I fear there is a fatal objection to "A Forsaken Lark's Nest" that the lark's eggs are hatched long before harvest, and that the incident, therefore, could never happen at all. The lark, however, has their broods in the year, and it is possible that the second may not be hatched till late summer. I will try to ascertain. The last line must be altered at any rate: a moment's reflection will convince you that eggs only wither in the bud in the kingdom of Ireland. "Precocious" p.129. l.10, is not the right epithet, it means prematurely ripe, but the apples have never ripened. The poppies and the corn in "Autumn Tints" are not of keeping with the rest of the picture. I am hardly enough of a seaman to ascertain "leeward" in the last sonnet, but it means "opposite to the wind", and if the wind were blowing from the sea would bring the vessel [clean/close] upon the rocks, I hardly think it can be right. The eighth line of "Green Leaves and Sere" is very weak, but the constraint of rhyme is very strong! This is all I can find to say.⁶⁶

When comparing Garnett's suggestions to the 1889 text, it becomes apparent that Blind never simply followed his advice. Unlike the notes on *The Heather on Fire*, the suggestions made in these letters are not confined to typographical mistakes, which might imply that there were either several versions of the proof pages, or that Blind wanted to continue working on the volume. As one can see from comparing the letters with the text, the acceptance of Garnett's suggestions in some cases would have required a substantial rewriting of the poem, which depending on the timing of the letters might not have been an option. Alternatively, Blind may have deliberately rejected the suggestions out of a desire to avoid losing the chosen symbolism in some of the poems.

Comparing Garnett's notes with the published text, one can see she accepted some of the suggestions made in the case of 'Chaunts of Life'. The words 'murdered souls' and 'holocaust' were criticised by Garnett, and were removed from the text, which was printed as:

⁶⁶ Ibid., ff. 34-35b. Garnett's comment that 'eggs only wither in the bud in the kingdom of Ireland' is a slightly racist way of describing Blind's metaphor as illogical.

And a hecatomb of martyred souls
 Fills a queenly town with wail of widows
 In those branded hours
 When red-guttering showers
 Splash by courts and stews
 To the Bells of Saint Bartholomew's.
 ('Chaunts', V., ll. 107 -112, p. 42)

It is more than likely that the 'murdered souls' Garnett critiqued became 'martyred souls'; however, the position of the other substitutions is more difficult to establish. The stanza also includes the suggestion Blind did not accept; the "unseemly" word 'stews' remains in the poem.⁶⁷ Whereas the first suggestion presents one with a meaning that is better suited to the main narrative, the second can be seen as directing Blind into a more female-appropriate direction, which could be interpreted in two ways: either Garnett wanted her to choose a word that reviewers/readers would be less likely to pick upon as unfeminine, or he was pushing her into a form of words that would be appropriate for a woman based on his own preference. Taking into account the information presented above, we can argue that the first option is the most likely one; Blind's decision to retain the word illustrates that she had precise notions about what her work should convey as well as demonstrating a rebellion against the Victorian ideas of propriety.

Considering other suggestions made in the first letter it is possible that Blind preserved 'gritty' rather than changing it to 'grimy' as per Garnett's suggestion. However, it is also possible that neither of the words was used in the final version as it is difficult to establish the line Garnett was referring to and that there are two instances when 'gritty' is used in the poem; the first in the line 'All blood-stained thy feet, with rags squalid and gritty' on page 70, and the second nine pages later, 'By dark ways and dreary, by rough

⁶⁷ Here 'stews' means a brothel or a house of ill fame. This meaning was still present in the nineteenth century, the last instance recorded in the OED was in William Hepworth Dixon · *History of two queens. i. Catharine of Aragon, ii. Anne Boleyn* · 1873–1874.

roads and gritty'. Comparing the two lines suggests that it is more than likely that Garnett was referring to the first one, as the substitution of 'grimy' for 'gritty' in the second one is nonsensical. The other suggested changes included in the first letter, were also disregarded; thus, 'velvet-footed' is still connected with 'call': 'When the velvet-footed shadows / Call the hind to evening prayer' (p. 56). Similarly, the 'peals' are also still swinging: 'Convent peals o'er pastoral meadows, / Swinging through hay-scented air' (p.55). The other lines mentioned also remained unchanged, 'Sea-fowls' screech round sphinx-like islands' (p.56), 'Belched smoke grimly flaming, which outraged the air' (p. 68), and 'And torn as with thorns and sharp brambles of June' (p. 69).⁶⁸

Expression of a similar attitude toward Garnett's corrections can be seen in the next letter; the 'breakers', 'smoking angels' and 'God-litten' all retained their respective places: 'with breakers of sound in full anthems elate' (p. 73), 'Dim hosts of plumed angels smoked up to the sky / With God-litten faces that yearned to the giver' (p. 75). However, Blind accepted the suggestion that irredeemable was a more appropriate epithet for loss: 'With a pang of immense, irredeemable loss' (p. 75). The other lines mentioned from 'AoM', such as 'Thy service to others, who needest their care.' (p. 76), 'Where the buttressed tree-trunks looked coeval / With the time-worn, ocean-fretted stone' (p. 88); 'Purple clover hummed with restless bees.' (p. 92) also remained unchanged [emphases mine]. The suggested change for page 88 demonstrates that Garnett's ideas were not infallible, as here he misunderstood that Blind was attempting to convey that the tree-trunks looked as old as stone. As it is difficult to establish how often Garnett

⁶⁸ In all instance the underlining is mine and refers to the words or phrases Garnett suggested to change.

misunderstood Blind's intentions due to lacunae in the records, one cannot make any further presumption from this line.

Following this Garnett goes on to discuss 'PoA', where he makes notes on 'The Sower', which Blind again largely ignored, and on 'The Music-Lesson', which he hoped to make perfect. However, one can assume that Blind did not see the poem as inadequate; thus, even if 'trickled' and 'blessing' were edited out, the remainder of Garnett's suggestions were dismissed. The original position of 'trickled' is difficult to determine based on the information available; it is most likely that the word was placed in the seventh line of the poem: 'Rippled through blossoming boughs of May'. Similarly, the advice on the insertion of 'the' prior to 'blessing' resulted in removal of the offending word. The suggested factual inaccuracy of 'apple-blossoms' being over by May was ignored, possibly because there was no fitting alternative, as Garnett acknowledged in the letter.⁶⁹ The last letter will not be discussed in so much detail as the previous two, since it supports the trend for the general disregard of Garnett's "improvements". For instance, if we are to compare the changes to one of the poems mentioned in the letter, 'On a Forsaken Lark's Nest' which belongs to 'PoA', we can see that Garnett's comment on the improbability of a lark laying eggs during harvest season was not of concern.

In addition to the above there is one more letter that presents one with an insight into Blind's process of composition. Blind wrote it to Garnett when she was visiting Cimiez and the impressions included in the letter allow one to trace the origin of two sonnets from 'PoA'. The connection between the letter and 'Cagnes' is the most overt one and as one can see there are almost word-for-word parallels. Blind undertook a trip

⁶⁹ Here one has also to note that if the setting of the poem was in a different climate than English, that is Blind was drawing on her previous life in Germany, travel experiences or the like, it is possible that the apple-trees being in bloom in May was accurate.

to Veuce Cagnes (now Cagnes-sur-Mer) on the French Riviera with Madame Bashkirtseff and Alexandre Bashmakoff.⁷⁰ The letter she wrote to Garnett contains the following description of the visit:

The Russians & I made an excursion to Veuce Cagnes the most picturesque place by far which I have seen here, a hill village dating back to the time of the Saracens and with not a modern discord in the way of architecture to destroy the hill. We went in a little cheap 'Bus crowded with holiday folk & then made our way up the steep narrow street, the walls and roofs of the houses having assimilated in there[?] with the grey rock, and the sober tinted olive trees. The view from the little Plaza at the top of the town took us completely by surprise. White shining in the distance the snowy peaks of the Maritime Alps rose against the deep blue sky, while the lower hills feathered for there as the pine & olive woods sloped down to a mysterious valley with a solitary road flanked by a clump of cypresses and the fragment of a Roman ruin. The terraced gardens with their downward incline were full of golden glow orange trees, on & by the roadside one tall & solitary palm reminded me irresistibly of Heine.⁷¹

A similar description of the scenery can be seen in the sonnet, 'Cagnes', here quoted in full:

IN tortuous windings up the steep incline
 The sombre street toils to the village square,
 Whose antique walls in stone and moulding bear
 Dumb witness to the Moor. Afar off shine,
 With tier on tier, cutting heaven's blue divine,
 The snowy Alps; and lower the hills are fair,
 With wave-green olives rippling down to where
 Gold clusters hang and leaves of sunburnt vine.

You may perchance, I never shall forget
 When, between twofold glory of land and sea,
 We leant together o'er the old parapet,
 And saw the sun go down. For, oh, to me,

⁷⁰ Add Ms 61929, f. 25b.

Cimiez during the time Blind was staying there it was a small town; nowadays it is a district of Nice.

Madame Bashkirtseff: mother of Marie Bashkirtseff (Мария Константиновна Башкирцева), whose *Journal* Blind translated in 1885

Alexandre Bashmakoff: Possibly a friend or relation of Bashkirtseff. His name also figures in Blind's commonplace book. This is either the Alexandr Dmitrievitch Bshmakoff, former governor of Odessa (1825-1888) whom Madame Bashkirtseff knew from the days of her youth or his son, also Alexandr (1858-1943) who was one of the members of the Pan-Slavic/ Slavic movement (*this details are only partial*)

⁷¹ Ibid., ff. 25b-26b. It is likely that Blind is referring the following poem by Heinrich Heine (1797-1856) 'A pine tree standeth lonely / Upon a Northern height; / By ice and snow surrounded, / It sleeps in mantle white. / Of a plane tree it lies dreaming, / Which far in Eastern lands / Mourns brooding in lone silence / Down on the burning sands.' in William Stigand, *The life, work, and opinions of Heinrich Heine*, (London: Longmans, Green, 1875, vol. 1), p. 145.

The beauty of that beautiful strange place
Was its reflection beaming from your face.

By comparing the two texts, one can observe that the descriptions present in the letter are repeated more or less exactly in the poem. The scenic village in both places is described as being on rising ground, a 'steep narrow hill' in the letter and a 'steep incline' (1) in the poem. In addition, both texts speak of the place's ancient origin as well as mentioning the Alps, olive trees, terraced gardens and gold clustered oranges, making the octave a concentrated representation of space. These similarities suggest the material in the letter was a precursor to the poem.⁷²

The other poem that echoes the description in the letter is 'On the Lighthouse at Antibes'. Even if resemblance between the passage in the letter and the poem is less striking than in the example above, it is possible to draw parallels between the scenery described in both texts. In the letter Blind describes how changes in the weather alter the landscape:

[T]he transparent glory of moon was followed by a wondrous sundown when the sea changing to the green as of molten metal shone against the promontory of Antibes cut out in solemn purple with the jagged [illeg] mountains behind it against a background of sky that looked a golden halo softly fading into infinitudes of ethereal blue I have never before seen such a sky here.⁷³

The sonnet contains a description of a striking sunset, which is the element that binds the first four lines of the octave together as well as the imagery corresponding to the molten

⁷² Considering the differences between the date at the back of the commonplace book and the one on the letter it is highly probable that the letter was written first and could have provided Blind with a memory aid for the sonnet. One also has to note that there is a mention in the commonplace book (p. 10) that is pertinent to this sonnet: 'Une route solitaire qui se perd dans le lointain. Veuce Cagens Bashmakoff'. This description of a road that loses itself in the distance is congruent with the description in the letter and is similar in tone to the poem. However, because the note is present without further context and in a document written significantly later than the poems it is difficult to unambiguously connect it to the poem.

⁷³ Add Ms 61929, ff. 23b-24.

metal of the sea (7-6), the promontory (4), the mountains, which transformed into the hills (11), and the storm, mentioned earlier in the letter:

A STORMY light of sunset glows and glares
 Between two banks of cloud, and o'er the brine
 Thy fair lamp on the sky's carnation line
 Alone on the lone promontory flares:
 Friend of the Fisher who at nightfall fares
 Where lurk false reefs masked by the hyaline
 Of dimpling waves, within whose smile divine
 Death lies in wait behind Circean snares.

The evening knows thee ere the evening star;
 Or sees thy flame sole Regent of the bight,
 When storm, hoarse rumoured by the hills afar,
 Makes mariners steer landward by thy light,
 Which shows through shock of hostile nature's war
 How man keeps watch o'er man through deadliest night.

These examples show how Blind draws inspiration from her immediate surroundings, which sometimes, as the first sonnet illustrates, are incorporated fully into a poem. Further evidence supporting this can be found in her commonplace book where several entries speak of her being moved by the landscape and possibilities of these impressions becoming poetry.

The material presented above illustrates a kind of literary “teamwork”, in which both partners act as equals. Blind’s friendship with Garnett presents itself as a mutually beneficial relationship, in which both are shown to be equal contributors. Garnett’s recorded input to *AoM* demonstrates that he attempted to edit, proofread and fact check her work, rather than enforce his opinions on her writing, as can be seen in the comments he made about the blossoming of the apple trees, and the lark’s nesting season.⁷⁴ Moreover, Garnett’s letters do not contain judgement on Blind addressing themes, such

⁷⁴ It is important to stress the word “recorded” as there might have been additional discussions of the volume of which there is no impact and so one does not have the complete picture.

as evolution, that are usually seen as masculine which suggests that there was a considerable amount of respect for Blind's authorial autonomy. As mentioned earlier, her decision to accept or refuse corrections to the text of *AoM* can be explained in a number of ways, none of which can be unequivocally proven as correct. However, her deciding to retain certain words or phrases, such as in the example with the word "stews", leads one to presume that she was particular about the ideas she wanted to convey and the imagery used to do so. Therefore, one can safely state that Blind was determined to be seen as an author in her own right, and not as a so-called "decorative" poet.⁷⁵

2.2. History of Production, Publication, Advertising and Sales

An important part of the story of the production of *AoM* consists of elements relating to the creation of a physical copy and making it visible to the public and reviewers. Such data is of considerable value when trying to establish the critical stages of a volume's life as it provides insight into the decisions behind the finished product. Before beginning the exploration of the particularities of *AoM*'s production we have to note that this volume was the first one Blind published with Chatto & Windus, who brought out all of her later volumes: *Dramas in Miniature* (1891), *Songs and Sonnets* (1893) and *Birds of Passage: Songs of the Orient and Accident* (1895).⁷⁶ One also has to pay attention to the fact that this is the only time when Blind collaborated with a publisher of her poetry for such a lengthy period, which makes the C&W archive (University of

⁷⁵ See chapter 3 on the perception of Blind in connection with her gender by critics and contemporary scholars.

⁷⁶ It is interesting to note that in 1880 Emily Pfeiffer published a volume entitled *Sonnets and Songs*.

Reading Library's Special Collections) a unique source of information on the elements of *AoM*'s production.⁷⁷

Most of the data regarding production of the volume are located in the publisher's production ledger, which details the number of copies printed, type of paper used, and the cost of all these elements, as well as in the several volumes of C&W letters to their authors.⁷⁸ However, almost all of the letters from Blind to the publisher have not survived due to the decline in her reputation, as explained on the Special Collection's website:

[T]he early correspondence files were lost when they were sent for salvage in 1915 to help the war effort. The letters from the authors to the publishers did not survive past 1905, when the letters from the authors who did not seem to be of much importance were destroyed.⁷⁹

However, there is one letter, held at HRC, which has been identified by me as being from Blind to her publisher; it will be discussed in detail later on in this section. It needs to be noted that the available information on *AoM* alone is not sufficient to create a complete overview of the processes connected with the preparation for publication and advertising as it contains a few lacunae, for which reason it will be supplemented in parts by the accounts on the later volumes. The destruction of these letters and other similar effects disproportionately damaged our understanding of the place of women writers in literary history. What is more, by arbitrarily classifying these authors as 'unimportant' the acting

⁷⁷ Her previous volumes were published by different companies, Newman & Co (*The Prophecy of St. Oran and Other Poems*), Walter Scott (*The Heather on Fire*), and her first volume *Poems* (as Claude Lake) was published by Alfred W. Bennett. The existing letters in C&W archive as well as held in the other collections do not explain the reasons for Blind's prolonged collaboration with C&W. A possible explanation can be that Blind had previously worked with the publisher as can be seen in an earlier letter where C&W refused her manuscript of a children's story.

8 April 1879, which speaks of a payment of £17.50 for Blind's contribution to the *Quarterly Magazine* for July.

⁷⁸ There are also some letters to Karl Blind in the C&W archive.

⁷⁹ University of Reading Special Collections. 'Records of Chatto & Windus Ltd'.

<http://www.reading.ac.uk/special-collections/collections/sc-chatto.aspx> (accessed 6 September 2012).

Also see pp. 179 ff. for the overview and discussion on the decline of Blind's reputation.

forces behind these actions changed the literary landscape of the nineteenth century and, to an extent, denied us the complete and accurate picture of the past.

One of the most important elements that this section has to establish is an approximate date of publication of the volume. Such data, for example, can be found in periodicals as in some cases the publishers included dates in the advertisement for the books. This, however, is not the case with *AoM*; there are several mentions in the press about the upcoming publication of *AoM*, yet they do not present a clear answer on the date. The earliest the volume is referred to in the media is in January 1889 in *The Athenaeum*, where a note states that *AoM* has recently been completed and will ‘appear shortly’ and includes a brief description of the volume’s contents: ‘the bulk of the book will consist of three pieces linked together by a common idea, respectively entitled “The Ascent of Man”, “The Pilgrim Soul” and “Chaunts of Life”.’⁸⁰ Considering Blind had a connection with this periodical, it is likely that this statement was accurate at the time of printing. Following that, there was a period of silence and the next one appears on 30 March 1889 also in *The Athenaeum*. It states that the volume will appear shortly and that it is present in the C&W catalogue for April 1889; the latter, however, does not indicate the exact date of publication. The next time *AoM* was mentioned was in a regional periodical, *The Blackburn Standard & Weekly Express*, on April 27, much closer to the actual time of publication. In contrast with the above it included additional information on the content of the volume:

⁸⁰ H.F. Wilson, ‘Literary Gossip’, *The Athenaeum*, January 1889, 85.

The name was transcribed by the Athenaeum Index of Reviews and Reviewers (1872-1900) and held at the University of Gent: http://aleph.ugent.be/F/18AEJ683DYTYFYM3DYNSR541TT8ULP7GYX2UUDREF7APCV9647-15822?func=full-set-set&set_number=001019&set_entry=000002&format=999 (accessed on 12/04/2014) At present, further research did not establish who Wilson was. Permalink for *The Athenaeum* collection is <http://lib.ugent.be/catalog/dbs01:001250318>

Miss Mathilde Blind's new book of poems may be expected immediately ... [it] is wholly devoted to a celebration, in verse, of the Darwinian doctrine. The chief poem traces the progress of mankind from the monkey to the French Revolution. Miss Blind read this long poem some weeks ago to a very distinguished audience.⁸¹

This announcement also contained an inaccuracy, revealing the author's (un)familiarity with Blind's life. In it, her stepfather, Karl Blind, is described as a Polish, rather than a German, emigrant. On the same day *AoM* was announced in the *Glasgow Herald*: 'Another book that has been delayed due to the Easter holidays is Miss Blind's "The Ascent of Man" which Messrs C&W will publish in a few days'.⁸² Finally, on 4 May 1889 an advertisement published in *The Athenaeum* indicates that the volume is now available. Based on these announcements, the book was published between 27 April and 4 May 1889. This range is in accord with the date stamp at the copy held in the BL: 6 May 1889.

The delay in the volume's publication could have been down to either the corrections to the texts, the Easter holidays, as specified by the *Glasgow Herald*, or both. As suggested by data on other volumes, all of these options are possible. For example, the publication of *Songs and Sonnets* was affected by both these factors, as can be seen from the letters from C&W. Indeed, tracing the preparation of *Songs and Sonnets* for publication one can observe that it should have been available to the public at the beginning of February 1893. However, the proofs demanded a lot of attention, with the correction stage lasting from around 20 January 1893, when the first twenty-three pages were sent to Blind, until at least 24 March. Bearing in mind that the volume is mostly a reprint and that there are no substantial changes to the texts of the poems, it is likely that

⁸¹ Anon., 'Miss Mathilde Blind' *The Blackburn Standard & Weekly Express*, 09 March 1889, 6.

⁸² Anon., 'Our London Correspondence', *Glasgow Herald*, 27 April 1889, 7.

the aim of the corrections was to preserve the poems in their original form.⁸³ What is more, the volume was delayed by Easter, as C&W deemed that period rather unsuited to the release of new books.⁸⁴ *Songs and Sonnets* was finally published on 26 April 1893, according to the advertisement *The Times*.⁸⁵ Comparing this data on *Songs and Sonnets* to the one available on *AoM*, it is likely that the earlier volume went through a similar delay with the proofs and it supports the information published in the *Glasgow Herald*.

We can find additional information concerning the time of *AoM*'s publication in the C&W production ledger as it contains dates connected to the preparatory processes such as the printing and binding of the volume's copies.⁸⁶ For instance, according to the record in the ledger the print run amounting to five hundred copies was ordered to be printed on 1 April 1889 by William Clowes and Sons, Limited, London and Beccles; all of the copies were sent to the publisher on the 5th.⁸⁷ Comparing this to notes in the periodicals one can see that the appearance of *AoM* in C&W's April catalogue coincided with it being printed, and, as the Easter weekend in 1889 fell on to 19-21 of April, this supports the hypothesis of the volume being delayed by the holidays.

To get a point of comparison for *AoM*'s print run one can firstly turn to the other volumes published by C&W; for instance, of *Dramas in Miniature* 500 copies were printed and the print run of *Songs and Sonnets* amounted to 250; considering the nature

⁸³ Comparing respective poems from *AoM* to *Songs and Sonnets* one can find only one difference between the texts of all of the repeated poems and even this change does not alter the poem in question too much. At present there is no documents that speak of Blind's reasons behind the creation of this volume, but that the change to the poem was authorial this suggests that the later volume represents a reprint/collected edition of her shorter works. What is more, the fact that the texts were not changed suggests that the poems represent Blind's final intention.

⁸⁴ See C&W collection MS 2444/28, p. 66.

In 1893 Good Friday fell on 31 March.

⁸⁵ See 'Publications To-Day' *The Times*, 26 April 1893, 11.

⁸⁶ The ledger also includes information on the cost of most of the materials and processes used to produce the volume, that is paper, jacket type and orders for printing and binding. The paper, for example, is described as follows: 'No of reams: 6 ½ + 1/4R + 5 qrs; Size and Colour: D.C. Handmade V.G. Weight 60 z; Price: 9 ½ Stationer S.H'. (See p. 480 in the ledger).

⁸⁷ See p. 480 in the C&W ledger for the appropriate record.

of the latter the shorter print run can be disregarded. This number of copies printed is not unusual for the poetry volumes during the Victorian period; Samantha Mathews notes that the typical print runs were between 500 and 1000 copies, ‘and it was necessary to sell more than two-thirds of the run to break even.’⁸⁸ What is more, she states that the ‘[s]tandard contractual terms required the poet to take on half profits and losses.’⁸⁹ As this section demonstrates, it is highly likely that all of this is applied to Blind’s interaction with C&W.

Returning to the publisher’s records, the next pertinent entry relates to the binding orders; on the same day that the copies returned from the printer, three hundred were sent to the binder, Burn. C&W ordered additional bound copies throughout the next six years: fifty in 1891, twenty-five in September 1893 and twenty-five more in 1895; leaving one hundred copies unbound and transferred to Fisher Unwin.⁹⁰ This appears to have been the typical practice, as usually publishers bound only the number of copies they thought would sell keeping the unbound copies for either a second edition or these would be later on sold to another publisher, as happened with *AoM*. Their records contain no further information on how and where the copies were allocated thus making it difficult to trace the destinies of these books. Judging by *AoM*’s sales statements included in the letters, one can presume that the numbers above appear to be linked to additional interest in the title. Other notes in the ledger also indicate that no reprints were ordered and that Blind retained the copyright to the poems.⁹¹ There were various issues at the time

⁸⁸ Samantha Mathews, ‘Marketplaces’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Poetry*, ed. Matthew Bevis (Oxford: OUP, 2013, Kindle edition) loc. 16713.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, loc. 16713

⁹⁰ An example of such a volume in a different cover, which was produced by T. Fisher Unwin is presented in appendix 000. On comparing the typical 1889 volume to the one with the one with T. Fisher Unwin cover one can see that there are no other changes.

⁹¹ The latter fact can be seen from the lack of entries in the copyright column, and is supported by the information in her will, in which Blind leaves the rights to her poems to her literary executors.

that were connected to the copyright. C&W's records do not contain additional information about their arrangement with Blind regarding rights and payments. The decade when *AoM* was published saw the introduction of a royalty system, yet it is more than likely that Blind did not have this arrangement with C&W as they were 'still regarded as sufficiently controversial'.⁹² P. J. Keating notes that at least for the publication of novels it was an established practice to sell the copyright to the publisher. However, as the ledger suggests this was not the case with *AoM*; it is more likely that Blind's case was similar to the situation that Matthew Arnold spoke about in his essay 'Copyright'. Arnold notes that authors usually retained the rights to their work for a set period, and could choose to extend it post-mortem to the estate of the writer.⁹³

Another point made by Arnold in the essay, which also preoccupied Blind, refers to the book prices: 'English books are exceedingly dear'.⁹⁴ His insistence on the need to produce cheaper books that should cost 'three shillings', and which would be 'as acceptable for the eye as the far dearer books which we have now' corresponds with Blind's desire to price the volume differently as described below.⁹⁵ Similar themes can be found in other contemporary sources, such as William Heinemann's essay 'The Hardships of Publishing' (1892). He argues that one of the main components contributing to the expense of a volume is the growing cost of printing and binding. In particular, these have risen to a level where 'it has become imperative to employ non-union houses for

⁹² P. J. Keating, *The Haunted Study, A Social History of the English Novel 1875-1914* (Faber & Faber: 2012) (Google play e-book), p. 7-8.

⁹³ See Matthew Arnold, 'Copyright', *Fortnightly Review* 159 (March 1880) in *Victorian Print Media. A Reader*, ed. Andrew King and John Plunkett (Oxford: OUP, 2005), pp. 110-115.

This hypothesis is supported by Blind's will, where she bequeathed her copyrights, royalties and the like to Mond and Symons

⁹⁴ Arnold, p. 112

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

work of an inferior order, such, for instance, as the setting of ordinary fiction'.⁹⁶ Furthermore, he claims that 'the public are more fastidious now with regard to print, paper, and general get-up'.⁹⁷ Although the article has a particular agenda (being a complaint about the unionisation of the printers and binders as well as about the writers' union rather than being a survey of the situation) it still is useful as it provides an indication of the issue of costs and customers' perceptions of the exteriors of books.

The letters between Blind and C&W show that there was a discussion about the volume's price. On 2 April 1889, Blind enquires about the possibility of altering the price, asking whether it is not too late to reduce it to five shillings, 'as my principle wish is that the book should find as many readers as possible and 7/ seems to us [Blind and William Sharp] a prohibitive price'.⁹⁸ In their reply dated 18 of April, C&W argue that there is no need for such a change:

[While] it is not too late to reduce the price of *The Ascent of Man* to 5/- we think that the volume will look well worth 7/-. It is longer than Mr. Swinburne's new *Poems and Ballads* and being printed on fine hand-made paper.⁹⁹

They continue by arguing that because of the paper and length the volume will not be seen as too expensive, that a decrease in price would not affect the sales, and that a price of five shillings would not 'cover the cost of producing'.¹⁰⁰ However, when looking at

⁹⁶ William Heinemann, 'The Hardship of Publishing', *The Athenaeum* 3 December 1892, in *Victorian Print Media. A Reader*, ed. Andrew King and John Plunkett (Oxford: OUP, 2005), pp. 150-5, p. 151.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

Looking at the production costs of AoM Chatto & Windus ledger provides details relating to the printing costs of AoM; breaking the expenses down as follows: 'Composition 15£ 10s 6d; Corrections 3£ 15s -; small type &c 2£ 7s; paper for text 15£ 17s 6d; working 3£ 10s and binding 5£ 7', *Chatto & Windus Ledger*, p. 480.

⁹⁸ William Sharp and his wife Elizabeth were one of Blind's close friends. this can be corroborated from for example them staying with her at Tunbridge Wells during Christmas and New year of 1888. See The William Sharp archive: http://www.ies.sas.ac.uk/sites/default/files/files/Research%20Projects/Sharp_Mcleod/1887-1888.pdf p. 3. Accessed 10/12/2014.

This is also corroborated by Elizabeth Sharp, who in her memoir of William writes that 'among his intimate friends he counted Mathilde Blind, the poet Louise Brevington, Mrs. Louise Chandler Moulton, Belford Bax and others'. Elizabeth A. Sharp, *William Sharp (Fiona Macleod). A Memoir* (London: William Heinemann, 1910), p. 51.

⁹⁹ Chatto & Windus letters, University of Reading Special Collections, Ms 2444/22, p. 600.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 600.

advertisements for the volume one can observe that the price indicated was five shillings with cloth extra, and so presumably one could buy a copy without a cover. Again, there is no information indicating why C&W agreed to this change and released the volume at the price Blind proposed.¹⁰¹

The aforementioned letter also indicates that Blind provided a design for the cover and wrote to the publishers asking to see an example of it ‘carried onto the cover’.¹⁰² Another aspect that was important to Blind regarding the book’s appearance was the cover’s colour: she attached two shades of green to the letter and stated that the lighter of the two would look good in buckram. In addition to this, she sent C&W a volume the cover of which was to be used as guidance ‘for the style & tone of the gilding’.¹⁰³ Based on these remarks we can deduce that Blind had very particular ideas about the impression the volume should make on the reader, and as demonstrated by the previous section she had a similar attitude to her poetry. This is supported by the content of the next letter from C&W, written between 18 and 29 April. The ink has mostly faded, but the readable fragments allow us to surmise that the letter discussed the cover of the volume including the material to be used for it. Blind asked for the volume to be bound in leather or another material, although both were deemed expensive by the publisher. It is also known that she was sent a dummy copy of the volume for approval, which possibly ended up becoming her commonplace book. A similar procedure was in place when *Songs and*

¹⁰¹ Considering that the letter mentioned the cost of production being factored in the end price of the volume, one can surmise that Blind might have gone back on some of the more expensive features of the volume. Furthermore, one has to wonder whether the price Blind was arguing about included the cover or not. Thinking back to the number of copies bound it is possible to wonder whether some of them were sold without a binding, but again there is no data to make any authoritative conclusions and knowing the practices of the time it is unlikely.

¹⁰² From a letter to Blind from C&W dated 29 April 1889, we know that they sent her a dummy book. From the same letter we can understand that the volume was just about to be printed and bound, as they were asking her where to send the early copy of the volume. Furthermore, the specimen in question could be her Commonplace Book, which can be found in Bodleian.

¹⁰³ HRC, Richard Garnett Collection, MS-1545, Container 10.6.

Sonnets was prepared for publication: C&W sent Blind various examples of paper and materials for binding. All of this reinforces the statement above about Blind having a clear idea of how her texts should be seen by prospective readers.

Speaking of the materials of which the book was made and its aesthetic appeal one has to consider the argument that there were certain expectations on the readers' part of the way books would look, as William Heinemann states:

the public are more fastidious now with regard to print, paper, and general get-up, as that they make, if not a united, in places, at least a definite stand against the horrible stuff they used to buy under the good-natured generalisation of "books".¹⁰⁴

This most likely refers to the cheaper and unattractive publications made out of wood-pulp paper that were available from, for example, the railway stations. Yet, it is probable that Blind's volume would have been addressing the same type of reading public that Heinemann was talking about therefore making Blind's choice of gilding, paper and the material for the cover a marketing decision which was supposed to appeal to a certain type of readers.

The material presented above demonstrates that the story of the production of Blind's volume was rather typical of late-nineteenth-century poetry production for both genders, as can be seen from the information on copyright, binding and the discussion about the price of the volume. Similarly, Blind's attitude to the cover's colour and the style of gilding was common amongst the authors of the period as a reaction to cheaper mass-produced publications. The fact that Blind's experience with C&W appears to

¹⁰⁴ Heinemann, p. 151.

reflect the usual practice for the authors of the time, regardless of gender, demonstrates that she was not treated differently because of her origin or gender.

The last two points relating to the production of the volume are connected with the immediate aftermath of its appearance in the physical form: advertising and sales data. *AoM*'s advertising costs is one area where there is almost no information on this volume. C&W's letter from 31 July 1889 shows that Blind had received a list of papers where the book was advertised.¹⁰⁵ *AoM*'s advertising costs came up to £32.0.3 and, according to this letter Blind paid for it: C&W acknowledge the receipt of about half the amount and request her to pay the remainder, and inquire about her preferences for further advertisements. The C&W records on Blind's other volumes supports the presumption that Blind was supposed to pay for advertising, which correlates with the point made by Matthews that '[f]irst time authors, or those with poor sales records, had to subsidize heavily, or to fund entirely the production, distribution, and advertising cost of a new volume'.¹⁰⁶ As *AoM*, Blind's first volume with C&W, did not boast record sales it seems likely that Blind would have to contribute to the expenses of future volumes. For instance, from the letters concerning *Songs and Sonnets* one learns that the total payment for production of the volume was £50, of which £25 went on advertising the volume in the press. There are no clear indications of advertising costs for other volumes, but available material provides the names of the newspapers where they were advertised. From the letters on both *Song and Sonnets* and *Birds of Passage* one can see that Blind was given a press list for approval with some of the suggested titles being *Daily News*, *Pall Mall Gazette*, *Scotsman*, *Speaker*, *Leeds Mercury*, *The Academy*, *The Athenaeum*, *Daily*

¹⁰⁵ The list itself was not included in the publisher's copy and it is reasonable to conclude it has not survived.

¹⁰⁶ Matthews, loc. 16713.

Telegraph and *Illustrated London News*. All of these were the usual places for such announcements. Considering that there are similarities between the list of periodicals that reviewed *AoM* and the list above one can assume that the same procedures were in place when *AoM* was advertised.

From the existing data we cannot deduce whether advertising the volume did more than just announce its publication, but the sales figures that are also present in the C&W letters suggest that *AoM* was not a runaway success.¹⁰⁷ At present, the best place to explore the sales are the already mentioned letters from C&W to Blind as a few of them contain statements of sales.¹⁰⁸ The first account can be found in the letter from 9 July 1889 and is equal to £9.17[or 12].6, which is also the largest amount that Blind received from the sales of this volume. From the following letters one can see that sales have declined relatively soon after the publication. This can be seen from the letters from 19 August and 11 of December 1889, which informed Blind that she was to receive £5.19.2 and £3.4.- respectively.¹⁰⁹ Based on the revenue one can surmise that the market demand for the volume had mostly been met by the end of the year.¹¹⁰

One can find further support for this in the reports from the following year; for example, the letter from 13 March 1890 Blind was owed only one shilling. What is more, at the same time C&W asked Blind whether ‘she is likely to require a reprint’.¹¹¹ They advised Blind that that a reprint is not worth considering as it is rather unlikely that the

¹⁰⁷ In exploring this data, one has to bear in mind that novels were more financially lucrative than poetry.

¹⁰⁸ Considering there are similar statements on other volumes, one can presume that it is habitual that the authors were regularly informed of their sales in this manner.

¹⁰⁹ According to the text of the letter, the statement was attached to it, but it is not clear whether it can be found elsewhere.

¹¹⁰ Comparing these numbers to the family budgets as presented in Lee Jackson’s *Dictionary of Victorian London* (<http://www.victorianlondon.org/finance/money.htm>, accessed 14/07/16) or to the *Victorian Web*’s data on the cost of living in 1888 (<http://www.victorianweb.org/economics/wages4.html> accessed on 14/07/16) it is likely that she would not be able to survive on the proceeds.

¹¹¹ Letter from 13 of March 1890, C&W collection, Ms 2444/23, p. 779.

volume will sell again. In addition to this, they suggest that it is not worthwhile saving the staging type for the book. From further correspondence, such as a letter dated 17 March 1890, it is apparent Blind disagreed with this advice. C&W argued that it would not be possible to save the type and urged her to decide swiftly because around June it would be required for another book.¹¹² This interaction demonstrates that the volume was not as commercially successful as Blind hoped and suggests that she might have been planning a re-issue of either the whole volume or the title poem. However, if Blind was hoping to develop and substantially revise the poem/volume in the future, as can be inferred from one of her interviews, it is likely that it would have needed a new standing type.¹¹³

Further evidence demonstrates that the sales kept declining, and by June 1890 they were almost non-existent. C&W tried to preserve the public's interest in the volume by continuing to advertise it, and by listing it in their catalogue.¹¹⁴ To improve the situation Blind once more tried to persuade her publishers to lower the price of the volume, although this time the request was unsuccessful; C&W's argument was that lowering the price would not affect the sales figures, which can also be seen as an argument for the market reaching its saturation as indicated earlier above.¹¹⁵

¹¹² Letter from 17 March 1890. Ibid., The fact that Blind wanted to preserve the type together with the information from one of her interviews hints at her intent to continue working on the poem, possibly by expanding it as any other explanation would suggest breaking up the type.

The other letters do not mention anything about the standing type's destiny or whether some parts of it were reused for *Songs and Sonnets*.

¹¹³ As it is typical with the most of available information on the volume, there are no more indications of whether of Blind had made any changes to 'AoM' or planned to republish the whole or part of the volume in any other way than in *Songs and Sonnets*.

¹¹⁴ Indeed, we know this since the letter from 25 September 1890 details that only four copies were sold and a later letter from 16 January 1891 informs us that there were still two hundred copies in stock. There is essentially no information on the sales or on *The Ascent of Man*, and from August 1891 their correspondence mostly deals with the *Dramas in Miniature*, which was published later that year.

¹¹⁵ There is no indication in the letters from C&W as to the price Blind wanted, but considering that earlier on the volume was sold for five shillings it is possible that she was proposing something in the range of 3 shillings, an example of the appropriate price given by Arnold in the previously mentioned essay.

In regard to the issues that possibly affected *AoM*'s sales, we have to include the following two letters from C&W, which allow one to infer that Blind was not entirely happy with the way C&W represented the volume in 1890. The first letter states that there are no new sales since their last account and that they 'are doing our best to keep the volume before the public ... [and] reference to it in our catalogues; we should not advise reducing the price at present, we are of opinion that in so doing it would not stimulate the sale'.¹¹⁶ The other letter suggests that there were perceived issues with the availability of *AoM*; C&W argue that since the publication of the volume 'we have been able to supply all orders without delay. We are quite certain that we have answered no one that the book has been "binding"[?] or "out of stock"'.¹¹⁷ It is likely that Blind thought that the volume should be more successful than it was and that there might have been some interference with its sales. Whether this had any impact on Blind's statement about revisiting 'AoM' is not known. Even a cursory comparison of the numbers in the ledger and in the letters suggests that the volume would not have been too profitable and the income from the sales would barely have covered the expense of producing the volume. However, here again is an unknown element as none of the letters or other material specifies whether Blind paid for all of the production costs herself or whether and how many deductions were made from all of the sums paid and how many copies of the volume were actually sold.

A final factor that could have affected the sales and, perhaps, even the reputation of *AoM* is the publication of Henry Drummond's (1851-1897) lectures. In 1894, he issued a series of lectures entitled *The Lowell Lectures on the Ascent of Man*, which became

¹¹⁶ Letter from 23 June 1890, C&W collection, MS 2444/24, p. 11.

¹¹⁷ Letter from 12 July 1890, Ibid., p. 184.

more commonly known as *The Ascent of Man*. Thus, it is not surprising that Blind took issue with Drummond's title and worried that it was affecting sales of her volume. Indeed, one of the letters from C&W suggests that she wondered whether Drummond using '*the Ascent of Man*' in his title could be construed as copyright infringement.¹¹⁸ As there is no detailed information on the sales of the volume during this period, it is difficult to estimate the effect Drummond's work had on Blind's, but taking into account the time that passed between the two publications it is likely that Drummond's choice of title did not affect *AoM*. However, later evidence suggests that Blind was right to be concerned. Exploring the material related to the reprint of *AoM*, one encounters a letter from Ludwig Mond to Alfred Russell Wallace, where the former explains that Blind was rather unhappy about the volumes sharing the same title:

The works that Mr. Drummond published under the same title appeared 5 years later in 1894. Mathilde Blind was greatly annoyed at Mr. Drummond having used her title; but apart from this I have every reason to believe that she did not know Mr. Drummond or his previous works. As you have spoken of Mr. Drummond in the second page of your introduction you will perhaps prefer to leave out this reference to him.¹¹⁹

A. R. Wallace's introduction demonstrates that he followed Mond's suggestion: 'she anticipated Professor Drummond both as to his title and in some of his main conceptions.'¹²⁰ The fact that Mond had to explain to Wallace that Blind's poem was not based on Drummond's ideas and that it was written several years prior to the publications of his lectures indicates a tendency for women's work to be appropriated by men. Another example of such an attitude is present in the reception of 1899 reprint of *AoM*,

¹¹⁸ See letter from 4 June 1894, C&W collection, MS 2444/29, p. 776.

Similar concern can be seen in a letter from Garnett to Blind, which gives one to understand that she attempted to contact Drummond. Add Ms 61929, f. 114.

¹¹⁹ Add Ms 46437, ff. 47.

¹²⁰ Alfred Russell Wallace, 'Introduction' in Mathilde Blind, *The Ascent of Man* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1899), p. vi.

where some critics thought that Blind had borrowed the title from Drummond. Such treatment of the volume, however, was not as prevalent during Blind's lifetime, as will be shown in the next section.

Speaking of the publication history and of the additional information that some of the volumes can provide, it is worthwhile to briefly address the use of *Songs and Sonnets* related material. On comparing it to the texts printed in both collections, one can see that the 1893 volume contains a considerable number of reprinted poems from *AoM*. As there are virtually no differences between the texts, one should not see it as a variant on the earlier volume but rather as a collected edition of Blind's shorter poems.¹²¹ As Richard Cronin argues in *Reading Victorian Poetry* it was popular amongst major Victorian poets 'to produce collected editions of their poems from mid-career [thus] divert[ing] attention from the individual poem to the poetic career'.¹²² It is likely that Blind attempted to achieve something similar; nevertheless, if one is to reflect on the print run of the volume, one might question the target audience of such an enterprise. However, it is noteworthy that Blind was approached during her life to publish a collected edition of her poetry, which is mentioned in a letter from 2 March 1896 addressed to Richard Garnett: 'I heard from Mr Smithers not long ago who asks "when may I hope to hear from you on the subject of [a] collected edition of your poems"'.¹²³ Nevertheless, the records on *Songs and Sonnets* supplement the material available on *AoM*.

¹²¹ The only difference is present in the title of one of the poems from 'Love in Exile': the first line of the second poem in *AoM*, 'I was again beside my love in dream', changed to 'I was again beside thee in a dream' (poem VI in *Songs and Sonnets*). As this is the only change to the poems previously published in *AoM*, it suggests that Blind did not intend on publishing a revised edition. There is no additional evidence that clarifies the reason behind this alteration.

¹²² Richard Cronin, *Reading Victorian Poetry* (Chichester, West Sussex : Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), p. 94.

¹²³ HRC Manuscript Collection, Richard Garnett Collection, MS-1545, Container 10.6.

2.4. Conclusion

The material presented above details the factual aspects of the volume's history: the time of composition, origin of some of the poems and the possible influences on their composition as well as their production and reception. In the first section, 'History of Composition', it was established that the earliest poem, 'Wings', was created prior to 1882, and that one of the final poems, 'Pilgrim Soul', was completed in September 1888. Even if this material suggests that the major part of the volume was composed during the 1880s, we cannot exclude the possibility that more than one poem might have been written before 1882. On comparing the poems that appeared in the press before 1889 to their versions in *AoM* one observes several discrepancies. However, these alterations are slight in nature, with the majority adjusting or clarifying the meaning of a passage, so they do not play an important role in the textual history of the volume. Their nature also suggests that Blind was particular in her choice of words and punctuation; an attitude that can be seen later on, for instance, in her approach to choosing the cover of *AoM*. In addition to the above, the material shows possible sources of inspiration for Blind's poems, such as landscapes observed on her travels or the spectacular sunsets from 1883.

The story of the composition, as demonstrated in the second section, also allows one to gain a deeper insight into some of Blind's friendships. In addition to this, the second section showed that Blind was considered an equal by, among others, William Michael Rossetti and Richard Garnett. One can see that the latter valued her opinions on their poems and that she was confident enough to argue against Rossetti's suggestions. The centrepiece of this section, the three letters by Richard Garnett containing notes on several poems from *AoM*, allow one to get as close to the manuscript versions of the poems as possible without having located the originals, which at present have not been

found. In addition to this, the letters also support the statement that she was particular in the images and word choices she used. Proof of this can be seen in the fact that Blind ignored Garnett's advice on some of the factual discrepancies present in the poems, also keeping words such as the unseemly 'stews'.

Considering the production and publication of the volume, there are considerable blanks in the material available. Thus, one can only establish a range of dates for when the volume was published. The volume had a relatively small print run, and despite its being advertised in the press around the country, it still did not appear to sell well. From the data recorded in the letters one can estimate that the total number of copies sold was slightly more than half of the print run. As the original reviews of *AoM* were generally favourable it leads one to presume that the contemporary poetry market for poets such as Blind was relatively small.

The material provided in this chapter can be seen as a model for further explorations of the lesser-known women poets as the more detailed investigation reveals the conditions in which women poets worked and aids our understanding of their place in the literary and cultural history of the period. Such an approach allows us to see whether the treatment of the poet in question was different from what was typical at the time and whether it is affected by such elements as gender or origin. What is more, by learning the details of composition and the ways an author's literary network and friends contributed to the shape of the volume we not only uncover unknown parts of a volume's history, in the case of *AoM* William Sharp's advice on pricing the volume or Garnett's comments on the proof sheets and indeed the existence of said sheets, but also such research contributes to the corpus of knowledge on the gender dynamics of the period, with the

relevant example being Blind's refusal to unquestioningly adopt Garnett's corrections, and their collaborative projects.

Chapter 3. Reception of *The Ascent of Man*

An important aspect of recovering *AoM* is to trace its reception from the moment it was published, in 1889, to 1900, when the poems forming this volume were published for the last time as an edition of collected poems.¹ By exploring a variety of responses to *AoM* as well as to the individual poems that form it we not only learn how Blind's contemporaries perceived the volume and how their opinions have changed with time, but also what drew the nineteenth-century critics and readers to the volume.

While selecting the reviews for this chapter several criteria were kept in mind in order to present the most representative picture of *AoM*'s reception between 1889 and 1900. Establishing this is of importance for the volume's recovery as this information is indicative of Blind's poetic success; as Samantha Matthews observes, 'Victorian poems move in more exchange economies than one: their success or failure can be measured in terms of sales figures, the profits and the loss, but also by cultural influence, critical esteem, public affection, and subjective interpretation.'² These last-mentioned elements contributed to the decision to present a more comprehensive picture of the of the volume's reputation; hence, in addition to reviews of *AoM*, this chapter also includes a pre-publication advertising article, readers' responses, obituaries and articles on other posthumous publications of her work.

Further factors that affected the selection of periodicals included the fact that *AoM* was not too widely reviewed and that some instances of the volume being mentioned in

¹ 'The Sower' is the only poem that was mentioned in the press before 1889; it was included in the review of E. Sharp's anthology *Women's Voices* where it was described as being 'full of the atmosphere of the country'; a view that, as will be seen later on, was not shared by other reviewers.

Anon., 'Women's Voices', *Liverpool Mercury*, 22 June 1887, 3.

See pp. 89, 111-2 for a more detailed note on the anthology and the poem.

Liverpool Mercury – a daily (from 1858) newspaper with a liberal and reformist leaning. It was founded in 1811 and in 1904 was bought by *Daily Post*. (Andrew John Hobbs, 'Liverpool Daily Post', *Dictionary of Nineteenth-century Journalism*, p. 369; 'Chronology', *ibid.*, p. xi.)

² Samantha Matthews, 'Marketplaces' *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Poetry* loc. 16681. (Kindle edition)

the press did not include material beneficial for this chapter; this was established by consulting archival copies of, firstly, the major London publications held at the British Library and then widening the search to regional press and using the on-line nineteenth-century newspaper collections, such as the ones provided by the British Library. The next step in selecting the reviews was to ensure that not only the periodicals focused on literary reviews were included but also the general-interest weekly and daily publications. By using reviews from a variety of publication-types and locations we are able to establish a better understanding of public's reaction to *AoM*.

Another aspect considered in selecting the reviews is the geographical locations of the periodicals used in this chapter: in aiming to determine the reception's trajectory between 1889 and 1900, the chapter will look only on the ones published in Britain. The reason for such limitation is Blind's desire to appear British, as mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, and looking at the publications from the country that she wanted to belong to helps to determine whether or not she became regarded as a legitimate voice of British poetry.³ Finally, the reviews were chosen based on their content as they needed to represent a variety of opinions on the volume in order for us to have a more well-rounded understanding of the critical opinion on Blind's poetry.

Most of the early mentions of *AoM* in the press were advertisements and, as such, were explored in the previous chapter; however, there is an exception – one of the pre-publication articles is a mixture between an early review and an advertisement and, one can surmise, it was meant to “set the scene” for the volume. It is an unsigned article, published in the *Young Folks' Paper* from 13 April 1889 under the heading ‘Two New

³ See pp. 27-31.

Poets'.⁴ The appearance of the article in this particular periodical is most likely connected with the fact that Blind's friend William Sharp was responsible for the literature-related matters of the periodical from 1887: 'Sharp replaced his friend Eric Robertson as Editor of the "Literary Chair" in the *Young Folks' Paper*, a widely-circulated weekly paper for boys'.⁵ As Sharp was one of Blind's friends and advised her on matters relating to the preparation and issuing of *AoM*, publication of a reasonably detailed piece prior to the appearance of the volume suggests that this is an instance of friendly help or "logrolling", as such type of assistance was described at the time.⁶ This type of aid was not unusual at the time; Joanne Shattock comments that the time 'of deliberately orchestrating favourable notices in the press ... [was] over, but ... it was not unusual for a poet's friend to generate appropriate enthusiasm for a new volume'.⁷ Thus, considering the favourable opinions on *AoM*, it is likely that the aim of this article was to generate enthusiasm for the volume as well as to expand its potential audience. Sharp's help with the preparation of the volume as well as his contribution to its positive reception indicates that he was part of Blind's literary network. As discussed in the introduction to the thesis, it was often

⁴ Anon., 'Two New Poets', *Young Folks' Paper*, April 13, 1889, 238.

All of the following passages quoted from the article have the same page number.

The second poet covered by this article is Graham R. Thompson, who is outed as female poet Rosamund Marriott Watson; it covers her volume *The Bird Bride: and Other Poems*.

Young Folks' Paper, which changed title numerous times through its existence 1871-1879 including such names as *Our Young Folks' Weekly Budget* (1871-6), *Young Folks'* (1879-84), *Old and Young* (1891-6) 'was aimed at boys and girls alike and a somewhat older and higher class of reader'. (Christina Margaret Bashford, 'Our Young Folks', *Dictionary of Nineteenth-century Journalism*, pp. 473-4, p. 474.)

⁵ William Sharp, 'Letter to the editor of *Lippincott's Magazine*, January 26, 1889' in *The William Sharp Archive*. Ed. William F. Halloran (http://www.ies.sas.ac.uk/sites/default/files/files/Research%20Projects/Sharp_Mcleod/1887-1888.pdf accessed on 10/12/2014, pdf p. 5)

⁶ Also of interest is that the article, at least the part on Blind, might also have been intended for an American periodical, *Lippincott's Magazine*, as suggested in Sharp's letter to the magazine editor dated 26 January 1889. (Ibid.)

⁷ Joanne Shattock, 'Reviewing', *A Companion to Victorian Poetry*, ed. Richard Cronin, Alison Chapman, Anthony H. Harrison (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 378-85, p. 380.

difficult for women writers to get established in the professional community so this kind of help was essential for a woman's career.⁸

The *Young Folks' Paper's* article states that the poems are anticipated by the reading public and that the volume 'more than justifies what rumour has said about it, and ... its success is a foregone conclusion', a sentiment that reinforces the conclusion made above.⁹ It is important to note that this article, unlike some of the later reviews, includes opinions on the other parts of the volume, which reinforces the hypothesis that it aims to represent the book in the best possible way and alert more readers to its existence. Thus, 'AoM' is described as a 'striking and impressive trilogy ... [that is a] remarkable poetic summary of the history of human development', 'PoA' is described as 'delightful', and 'Love in Exile' is deemed more interesting for a general reader.¹⁰ As for the individual poems, several of them are singled out for their poetic qualities, including 'The Sower', 'April Rain', 'A Spring Song', 'Apple Blossom', 'A Highland Village', 'Apple Gathering', 'Autumn Tints' and 'The Hunter's Moon'. 'The Sower' is described as 'reach[ing] a very high poetic level', and together with 'The Highland Village' is portrayed as 'representative of her [Blind] in her reflective and joyous moods'.¹¹ The poems from 'Love in Exile' are described as having 'all the fire and yearning and spirituality of Shelley', and are also compared to 'Love's Trilogy', a poem published in an earlier volume, *The Prophecy of Saint Oran and Other Poems*.¹² These comparisons

⁸ It could also have been that Blind got advice not only from William Sharp but also from his wife Elizabeth, yet her mention of only William in the letter to the publishers could have been a bit calculating — putting a male authority figure behind her decisions.

⁹ *Young Folks' Paper*, 238.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 238.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 238.

¹² *Ibid.*, 238.

suggest that the reviewer wants to indicate that there is a degree of continuity in Blind's work and also draws attention to the poems that could appeal to a wider audience.

Aside from providing an overview of the poems, as would be expected from a review or from an extended advertisement, the author also appears to believe that Blind needs to be introduced to the readers, even if she is described as 'an author of high repute in the literary world' in the same article. This feeling of necessity to introduce Blind can be seen as deriving from the lack of success of her previous volumes, which was attributed to problems with her previous publishers: 'her book [*The Prophecy of Saint Oran and other Poems*] fell rather flat in a general way, on account of the failure of the publisher shortly after the issue [of the volume]'.¹³ As for *The Heather on Fire*, although it was appreciated by members of the public who were knowledgeable about poetry, it produced the impression of being 'too distinctly a plea on behalf of the Crofters – that is, it was treated as a polemic rather than a poem'.¹⁴ Thus, by stressing the reasons for the previous volumes getting less success than they deserve, Blind's collaboration with C&W is presented by *The Young Folks Paper* as a new part of literary career. Even if there is no irrefutable data that points to William Sharp either authoring or being the moving force behind this article, it is more than likely that the information presented in it indicates a triple purpose: to acquire a new audience for Blind, to indicate a change in publisher, and to inform existing readers about Blind's new volume. The attention given to 'PoA' and 'Love in Exile' supports the assumption that the article was an attempt to increase Blind's readership, especially considering the comment made about Blind's previous volume,

¹³ Ibid., 238. *The Prophecy of Saint Oran and Other Poems* was published by Newman & Co in 1881. The need for introduction can also stem from the fact that the article apparently was supposed to be published in the US.

¹⁴ Ibid., 238.

The Heather on Fire; knowing that Sharp was responsible for the literature-related part of the periodical supports and amplifies these conclusions.

Turning to the actual reviews, one of the earliest and the worthiest of exploring in detail, was published in *The Athenaeum* on 20 June 1889 and written by H. F. Wilson, as specified in the previous section. What is more, this is the only article that is similar to Blind's own poetry reviews, published in the same periodical, in its attempt to assess the technical qualities of some of the poems. On the whole, Wilson's opinion of the volume is favourable, with the verdict on 'AoM' being that it is a 'remarkable poem that cannot fail to increase its author's reputation as a brilliant and original writer'.¹⁵ Furthermore, Wilson states that Blind possesses a genuine gift for song: 'from Chaos to Kosmos, from the "indefinite incoherent homogeneity" to the "definite coherent heterogeneity", she hurries her reader along, breathless and perspiring, but never anxious to stop'.¹⁶

Whilst highlighting Blind's contribution by stating that with 'AoM' she had produced 'perhaps the earliest embodiment in verse (on any considerable scale) of the theories of Charles Darwin and his followers that has appeared in England' Wilson does not find Blind's treatment of history and evolution altogether convincing.¹⁷ From Wilson's viewpoint, 'AoM' 'does not bear towards evolution a relation in any way comparable to that between the *De Rerum Natura* of Lucretius and Epicureanism', with the poem's 'exposition of the facts ... infinitely less complete', but Blind's 'effort ... is

¹⁵ H. F. Wilson, 'The Ascent of Man: and Other Poems by Mathilde Blind', *The Athenaeum*, 20 June 1889, 87-8, 88. *The Athenaeum* – a weekly literary journal.

¹⁶ Ibid., 87. Here the reviewer quotes from Tennyson's 'Locksley Hall Sixty Years After': 'Chaos, Cosmos! Cosmos, Chaos! who can tell how all will end! / Read the wide world's annals, you, and take their wisdom for your friend.' (ll.103-4). In addition to this Wilson also refers to Spencer, who used the terms 'indefinite incoherent homogeneity' and 'definite coherent heterogeneity' on numerous occasions in his work *First Principles*; for example, '[t]he more specific idea of Evolution no reached is – a change from an indefinite, incoherent homogeneity, to a definite coherent heterogeneity, accompanying the dissipation of motion and integration of matter'. (Herbert Spencer, *First Principles*, (New York: Caldwell, 1880, 4th ed.), p. 320).

¹⁷ Wilson, 87.

one deserving of high praise'.¹⁸ Wilson also draws the reader's attention to the fact that the topic of evolution had already been discussed in German literature: 'German bards have already essayed the thing, but then in modern Germany the boundary line between poetry and prose is not particularly distinct'.¹⁹ The two comments not only imply that *Blind* was not overtly successful in her treatment of evolution, but also that she was reworking German writings on the subject rather than creating an original scientific contribution, whilst also referencing her otherness in a rather derogatory manner. In addition to the above, Wilson notes Herbert Spencer's influence over how facts are presented in the poem, although he does not specify any details (see note 16 above).

Another element that makes this review stand out is Wilson's account of individual poems, which is rarely found in other reviews. In his description of the title poem Wilson especially applauds 'Chaunts of Life' calling it 'the best portion' of 'AoM' and he dedicates a considerable portion of the review to it.²⁰ This is also the only part of the volume that is extensively quoted in the review with Wilson arguing that these passages are indicative of 'the style and scope' of the part in question; the chosen excerpts mostly refer to the history's early stages such as lines seven to thirty from the second canto.²¹ The other sections of 'AoM' do not amass as much praise; although he observes that 'The Pilgrim Soul' 'contains some fine descriptive passages', the quality of its verse is marred by 'excessive alliteration' and rather 'diffuse' treatment of the subject.²² When describing 'The Leading of Sorrow' only the negative aspects of *Blind*'s chosen metre come into focus: 'the eight-line metre in which it is written, though on the whole skilfully

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 87.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 87.

²⁰ It has to be noted that in speaking about 'Chaunts of Life' Wilson misspells its title; he uses a more conventional spelling of the word 'chants'.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 87.

²² *Ibid.*, 87.

handled, tends to become monotonous'.²³ Other issues singled out by Wilson include the use of assonance for rhymes, and Blind lacking 'the sense of restraint which imparts finish and distinction to verse no less than to pictures and statuary'.²⁴ In general, according to Wilson, 'PoA' shows Blind's 'delicate susceptibility to the influences of nature'. Of the twenty-two poems that form the section, Wilson singles out three. 'The Teamster' is characterised as being 'marred by certain faults of taste' and the village talk in the beginning of the poem is 'bald to the verge of banality'.²⁵ The other two poems, 'Highland Village' and 'Reapers' were better received; the former is deemed to be 'far pleasanter' than 'The Teamster', reminding Wilson of 'a dainty picture of some Spey-side townlet like Kingussie or Aviemore'.²⁶ Whereas 'Reapers' conveys 'the effect of a windless August afternoon', something achieved with the help of 'odd metre and vivid word-painting'.²⁷ Considering Wilson's comment on 'eight-line meter' it is possible that this "oddness" of the metre is mostly connected with it deviating from the more familiar prosody as well as with a degree of gender bias as the prosodic elements deviated from the more familiar classical patterns and most women at the time did not study classics.²⁸

Comparing this opinion to the one expressed in the *Women's Penny Paper*, we observe that the latter periodical contradicts Wilson's evaluation of Blind's poetic craftsmanship: 'technically the verse-workmanship is masterly: the verse is sonorous and well balanced; the diction simple and unaffected; and the style marked by the essential

²³ Ibid., 88.

It is likely that in mentioning an 'eight-line metre' Wilson is referring to the number of lines in the stanzas, which makes his turn of phrase either a linguistic peculiarity or demonstrates the fact that he was not very well versed in prosody. The poem in question is written in trochaic pentameter with alternate catalectic lines.

²⁴ Ibid., 88.

²⁵ Ibid., 88.

²⁶ Ibid., 88.

²⁷ Ibid., 88.

²⁸ For more on this issue see Isobel Hurst, *Victorian Women Writers and the Classics: The Feminine of Homer* (Oxford: OUP, 2006).

qualities of distinction'.²⁹ As several comments in *The Athenaeum's* review suggest, Wilson's understanding of poetic theory is far from being complete, therefore it is probable that the opinion presented by *Women's Penny Paper* is more trustworthy as well as, considering the nature of the publication, less likely to be gender biased. The fact that gender affected Wilson's opinion of Blind can also be seen in the way 'Love in Exile' is presented; it reminds the reviewer of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poetry in the 'intensity [of its] expression of personal passion'.³⁰ This comment on the presence of passion and emotion in poems is important as these two aspects were often seen as quintessentially feminine features with the phrase 'man reasons, woman feels' being present in a number of sources from the period.³¹ Together with Wilson's opinion on Blind's interpretation of evolutionary theory this indicates that the reviewer doubts whether a woman can write sophisticated poetry or touch upon such complex themes as evolution.

Other articles on the volume are not as detailed as the two above and, in a few cases, *AoM* is explored as a part of "recently released" series rather than being separated as above. On perusing these texts one can single out two recurring themes that are of particular interest. First and foremost, there are evolution-related elements that were often commented on, as is evident from the articles published in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, *The Academy*, *The Nottinghamshire Guardian*, and *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. Some of these, such as the *Pall Mall Gazette* and *The Academy*, expressed a positive opinion of

²⁹ Anon., 'Reviews', *Women's Penny Paper*, 1 June 1889, 11.

Women's Penny Paper – a weekly paper founded in 1888. It is considered 'the most vigorous feminist paper of the time'. Till 1892 it was aimed at a 'broad readership'. (Elyssa Warkentin, 'Women's Penny Paper (1888-1890); Woman's Herald (1891-1893)' *Dictionary of Nineteenth-century Journalism*, p. 683.)

³⁰ H. F. Wilson, 88.

³¹ This particular instance can be found in E. S. D., 'Woman's Vocation', *London Society. An Illustrated Magazine of Light and Amusing Literature for the Hours of Relaxation*. (London, 1866, Vol. IX), pp. 102-109, p. 102. *London Society* – a monthly, launched in 1862, with heyday in the first half of the 1870s. By the time when this article was published the periodical was in decline. (Beth Palmer, 'London Society', *Dictionary of Nineteenth-century Journalism*, pp. 376-7.)

Blind's treatment of evolution and history. Thus, the *Pall Mall Gazette* notes that 'the subject is by no means an easy one to treat in a truly poetical fashion, but, on the whole, Miss Blind has shown great skill in mastering difficulties inherent to her task'.³² Addressing Blind's treatment of evolution, this article speculates about the imaginative source of the poems that, in the reviewer's opinion, arises from 'the mysterious prehistoric vista which researchers in various fields have lately opened up, and her descriptions of the early struggle for existence are powerful and picturesque to a high degree'.³³ However, 'in her versifications of actual history the writer is, we think, not so uniformly successful, though in her account of the birth of the arts there are lyric outbursts of great beauty'.³⁴ These two comments suggest that 'AoM' was received fairly well by *The Pall Mall Gazette* and even if the reference to 'lyric outbursts of great beauty' can be perceived as a concept relating to gender, it is much milder than the same type of observation in *The Athenaeum*.

The second review that touches upon Blind's treatment of evolution, written by George Cotterell and published in *The Academy*, highlights the more positive outlook present in Blind's work when compared to Darwin's:

The singularly happy title of this book shows an advantage which the poet sometimes has over the man of science. When the latter traces the evolution of the human species he calls his work "The Descent of Man." The poet, undertaking a similar task, adopts a title which seems the exact antithesis of that. To him - in the present instance to her - the process is an ascent.³⁵

³² Anon., 'Recent Volumes of Verse', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 25 July 25, 1889, 3.

Pall Mall Gazette daily evening tabloid established in 1865 and aimed at a select readership in the 1880s it was edited by W.T. Stead. (Christopher Andrew Kent, 'Pall Mall Gazette' *Dictionary of Nineteenth-century Journalism*, pp. 477-8.)

³³ Ibid., 3.

³⁴ Ibid., 3.

³⁵ George Cotterell, 'The Ascent of Man', *The Academy*, 15 June 1889, 406.

The Academy – a weekly (from 1874) publication focused on literature, arts and science; established in 1869 'as a more scholarly, and signed version, of the *Athenaeum* (Kent, 'Academy' *Dictionary of Nineteenth-century Journalism*, pp. 1-2, p. 1.)

In his overview of the title poem, Cotterell, like Wilson, primarily focuses on ‘The Chaunts of Life’, examining Blind’s treatment of the history of human kind and observing that ‘the poet has much to say about man the animal.’³⁶ Overall, the poem is described as narrating ‘a brave, sad, glorious story, told with inimitable skill, and as only a poet who knows man’s heart, with its hopes, doubts, fears, aspirations could possibly tell it’.³⁷ A considerably smaller portion is devoted to the longer poems from the second and third parts of ‘AoM’: ‘the story of the ascent of man is rendered complete by two distinct poems of remarkable excellence’, with the latter poem being summarised as ‘a sad, pitiful, review of the lot of men in some of its harder phases’.³⁸

Even if *The Athenaeum* was more critical of Blind’s venturing into the scientific realm, Cotterell’s and Wilson’s reviews exemplify the positive opinions of *AoM* and Blind where she is perceived as a poet, and the interpretation of evolutionary theory was not considered too compromised by her gender or origin. Yet, there are several other publications that present an opposite view and a much harsher critique of Blind’s understanding of Darwin. One of these was published in a regional periodical, the *Nottinghamshire Guardian*. First and foremost, it queries Blind’s interpretation of the creation of the world: ‘it seems strange that people should quarrel with Genesis, and accept such an explanation of the world’s origin as this — “Struck out of dim, fluctuant forces, and shock of electrical vapour, / Repelled and attracted the atoms flashed, mingling in union primeval”’.³⁹ One of the issues that the reviewer has with the poem

³⁶ Ibid., 406.

It is worth noting that the reviewer defines Blind as a poet rather than a poetess.

³⁷ Ibid., 406.

³⁸ Ibid., 407.

³⁹ ‘Our Ladies’ London Letter’, *Nottinghamshire Guardian*, 27 July 1889, 8.

It has to be noted that punctuation in the quotation from the poem is incorrect. In Blind’s version there are no commas but at the end of the lines.

Nottinghamshire Guardian – a weekly regional newspaper aimed at general audience.

and, possibly, with the current scientific theories, is that for the reviewer there is no plausible alternative to the existing Biblical origin narrative. Thus, it is likely that the volume is judged not only on its poetic merits but also the fact that Blind did not steep her narrative of creation in Genesis or present a satisfactory scientific explanation of the theory used to explain the origin of the earth and humans. Indeed, one can see this from the outset: 'I am cynical enough to think that a certain school of writers are inclined to applaud any production which involves an attack upon old-fashioned beliefs, and substitutes the new so-called scientific theories'.⁴⁰ This review exemplifies an instance when the poem and the volume are judged not on the poetic qualities or interpretation of a theme, but rather on a fundamental difference in the perception of the world's origin as well as it demonstrates a degree of disagreement with anything that moves away from the traditional worldview. Such criticism is not surprising considering the subject matter of 'AoM' and that, at the time, the scientific explanation of the origin of the world was not universally accepted.

The reviewer's negative attitude toward the use of evolutionary theories as a subject for the poem also influenced his attitude toward Blind; she is described as 'a strong-minded lady, who expounds Darwinian theories in rather formidable language', which 'is not a satisfactory exhibition of feminine power'.⁴¹ This statement suggests that, in addition to the general dislike of non-religious explanations of the world's origin, the reviewer thinks that a woman was not supposed to approach such equivocal themes as science as they are unfeminine. It is surprising, then, that the reviewer mainly focuses on 'AoM' and does not pay attention to poems from the other two parts of the volume as

⁴⁰ Ibid., 8.

⁴¹ Ibid., 8.

these would be more in accord with the established societal norms of femininity. Thus, it is likely that the reviewer chose to focus upon the elements that were antagonistic to his or her worldview and to broadcast his or her opinion of them to a larger audience.

Another review that has a more negative reception of *AoM* was published in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* as a part of 'The Old Saloon' (August 1889), Margaret Oliphant's regular column in this periodical.⁴² In contrast with the previous article, the reviewer does not dispute the appropriateness of the poem's subject-matter for a woman-author, as Oliphant was an ardent supporter of female education, but disagrees with Blind's treatment of it. Thus, although the poem is described as strictly following Darwinian theories 'from the ooze and slime up to the highest honours of civilization', Blind's knowledge of the subject is considered inadequate, and Oliphant regrets Blind's failure to provide more information concerning the earlier stages of human development.⁴³ It is argued that Blind was wise not to dwell on this, since she 'has so evidently' nothing to add; the implication of this is that the work reads as if written by an amateur scientist who decided, by chance, to start writing verses. This last point is especially telling of Oliphant's attitude to Blind's poem. It suggests that Oliphant was not convinced that Blind possessed the poetic skills and evolutionary knowledge necessary to tackle the subject she had chosen to deal with.

Oliphant also raises an issue in relation to 'AoM' is the figure of Love present in the text, from the creation of the earth, 'Lo, moving o'er chaotic waters / Love dawned upon the seething waste' ('Chaunts', II, ll. 1-2, p. 9) until the moment of the redemption

⁴² Information on Oliphant's collaboration with *Blackwood's* can be seen in, for example, *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Women Writing*, Chapter 3, section 2. (iBooks publication).

⁴³ Margaret Oliphant, 'The Old Saloon' *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, August 1889, Vol. 146, 254-75, 273. *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* – a monthly magazine focusing on literature and literary and political reviews. Published works by such authors as Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Margaret Oliphant and George Eliot.

of humanity at the very end of *AoM*: 'It was Love himself, Love re-arisen / With the Eternal shining through his eyes' ('Sorrow', ll. 454-5, p. 110). The reviewer argues that Love's presence in the poem contradicts Darwinian principles. In the course of previous chapters, we have seen that the figure of Love is influenced by Mazzini's and Shelley's work as well as being a vehicle to symbolize hope for a positive future development that counteracts the depictions of degeneration seen in Blind's depiction of the current state of humanity. What is more, Love can be seen as a bridging element between the more traditional ideas of the genesis story and a Darwinian interpretation, and as there is noticeable agnosticism in *Origin*, Blind's use of Love is not too contradictory to Darwin's principles. Oliphant's comments then suggest that her reading of Darwin's theory is different from Blind's which, bearing in mind that at the time there were a few different (mis)interpretations of his ideas, is not at all impossible.

Another point worthy of singling out is the attention to the other poems in the volume as most of the reviews focus on 'AoM'. From these, the majority of the comments relate to 'PoA' and are of a rather generic nature; for example, *Glasgow Herald* mentions 'a number of attractive "Poems of the Open Air" from which had space allowed we should have gladly quoted', and *The Morning Post* describes them as possessing 'a joyous freshness' that 'runs through many of the minor poems in the volume', such as 'The Sleeping Beauty'.⁴⁴ In most cases these articles are similar in their estimations of 'PoA' thus removing the need for a more detailed comparison. Such lack of attention and diversity of opinion most likely is the result of these poems covering subjects that were

⁴⁴ Anon., 'Poetry and Verse', *Glasgow Herald*, 23 May 1889, 4. The same issue also contains an advertisement of *AoM*. *Glasgow Herald* – a daily newspaper aimed at general audience.
Anon., 'The Ascent of Man', *The Morning Post*, 15 July 1889, 5. *The Morning Post* – a daily newspaper aimed at general audience.

not as controversial as 'AoM' and being more in tune with the type of works expected from a woman author. The same is most likely true for the poems forming 'Love in Exile', as they received even less attention.

The material presented above embodies the more immediate responses to the volume, with most of the reviews being published within the first couple of months after the volume. Apart from the articles covered there are some minor notices that do not provide any additional interest for this chapter. Following the reviews published in 1889 there were no other significant mentions of the poems included in *AoM* in the press until the publication of *Songs and Sonnets* in 1893. Augusta Webster in her review of the volume for *The Athenaeum* states that it is 'too much a reproduction of a recent issue to require comment'.⁴⁵

There are two more reviews that should be mentioned, even if only one of them, *The Academy*, mentions a poem from *AoM* – 'L'Envoi', which is described as 'contain[ing] three absolutely exquisite verses'.⁴⁶ *The Academy* has a mixed opinion on the volume; the final verdict is present in the following phrase: 'we are not able to say that all we hoped was answered by the contents of *Songs and Sonnets*', with a particular criticism of 'A Parting', which is seen as a collection of clichés.⁴⁷ *The Bookman* is also critical of Blind's work: 'Miss Blind has some sweet notes, but in her series of poems, "Love in Exile," the sweetness and the sentiment are too often sickly and flabby' it notes a couple of positive points being, however, more critical than *The Academy*.⁴⁸ Whereas

⁴⁵ Augusta Webster, *The Athenaeum*, 30 September 1893, 451-452.

⁴⁶ Anon., 'Songs and Sonnets', *The Academy*, 5 August 1893, 109.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 109.

⁴⁸ Anon., 'The Bookman's Table', *The Bookman*, August 1893, 152-3.

The Bookman – a monthly magazine established 'in 1891 as an illustrated literary journal aimed at working writers, general-interest readers and booksellers ... part celebrity magazine ... [it] included up-to-date information about authors and the publishing industry'. (Marie Alexis Easley, 'The Bookman' *Dictionary of Nineteenth-century Journalism*, pp. 62-3 p. 62)

the mixed reviews and lack of attention can, at least partially, be explained by the nature of the volume the fact that both articles were more critical than the ones on *AoM* can suggest that her position in the literary society might have been not as established as the previously presented material would suggest.

Posthumous reception

The final stage in looking at the reception of the volume is by looking at how the same poems were received shortly after Blind's death and, if it changed, what the reasons for this might be. With Blind's death and the publication of the selected and collected editions of her poems as well as the reprint of *AoM* there was a small resurgence of interest in her works. The reassessment of Blind's work and persona started straight after her death with some of the obituaries being far more critical than any of the articles above. In this respect, we should mention *The National Observer*'s valid remark that there had been very few notices of Blind's death, which suggests that her popularity was waning at the time.⁴⁹ The same article lists Blind's literary achievements and express hope for the publication of a collected edition of 'Miss Blind's highly intellectual and sometimes genuinely passionate verse', an opinion that possibly hints at Blind's work being not feminine enough in its subject as well as not poetic enough.⁵⁰

Looking at other obituaries, we can see that there are several that describe Blind and her work in neutral terms, like the one published in *The Times* on 28 November 1896. These neutral articles simply recount a list of Blind's works, or, as in the case of *The Speaker*, make a brief yet positive comment: 'Miss Mathilde Blind was a well-known

⁴⁹ 'The Literary Looker-On', *The National Observer*, 5 December 1896, p. 70.

The National Observer – a weekly general-interest periodical founded in 1888.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

essayist and writer in many departments of literature. Good judges gave her a very high place as a poet or critic'.⁵¹ Others registered the imperfections in Blind's work but were not too overtly negative in their description. Thus, in *The Academy* on December 5, 1896 the author, signed only as 'W.S.', argued that Blind's mastery of poetical technique was not sufficient to succeed in writing the epic she hoped to achieve with 'AoM', yet at least parts of it can be deemed beautiful: 'Her most ambitious work. *The Ascent of Man*, noble and beautiful as it is in parts, is too loosely apprehended as a whole, and too unequally wrought, to rank as a masterpiece'.⁵² In a similar way Blind's origin was brought into discussion: she 'was not English by birth or parentage, though English in all else. Nothing ever so disconcerted or even offended her as the imputation that she spoke or wrote English marvellously well for a German'.⁵³ Even if Blind's otherness was not presented as a major drawback for her literary work, reminding the readers of it might have affected opinions on Blind's poems for the years to come, especially in view of growing hostility between the United Kingdom and Germany towards the end of the nineteenth century.

An example of a predominately negative article is the extensive obituary by Theodore Watts-Dunton published in *The Athenaeum* on 5 December 1896. In regard to Blind's poetry, Watts-Dunton hints at its being imperfect due to, amongst other things, her not being English. On the whole, his opinion of Blind and her work is best expressed in the final paragraph of the article, where Watts-Dunton denies Blind's having any capability for writing poetry:

⁵¹ Anon., 'Obituary', *The Speaker*, 5 December 1896, 604.

The Speaker – a weekly liberally leaning periodical, first published in 1890, focused on literary and political reviews. It is worth noting that Richard Garnett's son Edward was on the staff of this periodical. (Christopher Andrew Kent 'Speaker', *Dictionary of Nineteenth-century Journalism*, p. 587.)

⁵² W.S., 'Mathilde Blind', *The Academy*, 5 December 1896, 497.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 497.

Miss Mathilde Blind's desire to become famous as a poet can only be called feverish, and in her later days, when she did at last succeed in winning a reputation, this fever became very apparent – so apparent, indeed, that if a friend or two on that account found her less interesting than of yore, it would not be a matter of surprise. If anything can sap a noble nature it is this same disease – the greed for fame. I do not say that it would have ended by spoiling Mathilde Blind's nature, but there are not that many noble natures that it cannot spoil.⁵⁴

This passage feeds into the gender-related issues with women's authorship mentioned earlier in the thesis and in doing so recalls the attitude in Anthony Trollope's *The Way We Live Now* pointed out by P. J. Keating where he argues that,

literature ... is seen as a part of general malaise through Lady Carbury's ambition to build a career "not by producing good books, but by inducing certain people to say that the books were good" and her refusal to believe that "anything like real selling praise is ever given to anybody, except for friends"⁵⁵

Trollope's description of Lady Carbury's attitude to literary success resonates with Watts-Dunton's opinion of Blind, who argues that her 'feverish desire' to become a poet alienated some of her friends. However, the available evidence suggests that this might not necessarily have been the case, especially, if we are thinking about her closet friends such as the Monds, Rowley or Garnett. What is more, the fact that such a statement is present in the article suggests either that Watts-Dunton was unfamiliar with Blind's life or that the source he used was less than reliable.

The manner in which this obituary presented Blind and her works makes it the first explicitly negative article of the many that would follow. For example, when *A Selection from the Poems of Mathilde Blind* was published in 1897, a year after her death, it was not particularly well received. Another periodical, *The Academy*, writes that 'she

⁵⁴ Theodore Watts-Dunton, 'Mathilde Blind', *The Athenaeum*, 5 December 1896, 797.

In his comment on Blind's yearning for fame Watts-Dunton relates to John Milton's 'Lycidas': 'Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise / (That last infirmity of noble mind) / To scorn delights and live laborious days' ll. 70-2. (accessed through https://www.dartmouth.edu/~milton/reading_room/lycidas/text.shtml on 5/12/16)

⁵⁵ Keating, p. 6.

chose to be regarded as a poetess, and published one volume after another, encouraged by praise of undiscerning friends', a sentiment that recalls Watts-Dunton's expression.⁵⁶ Similarly, Blind's poems are denied any poetic quality, arguing that they have 'little or no imaginative insight; no creative, and little interpretative power' with several poems from 'PoA' deemed 'dull, conscientious studies'.⁵⁷ The review denigrates Blind's intellectual capabilities, arguing that her 'intelligence was not strong enough to consume, to fuse its [Darwin's idea] scientific material into the glowing vapour of imaginative truth' and suggesting that her interpretation of evolution was seen as not only unsuccessful but also as something that needed to be forgotten and done anew.⁵⁸

Amongst the posthumous reception of the volume, we have to mention the final article in which *AoM* was explored on its own, was a review of its 1899 reprint, entitled 'Darwin and the Muse'. Of particular interest is this review's presentation of Blind's otherness: '[i]t is difficult to believe that a woman with an accent made in Baden could write English verse of the highest quality'.⁵⁹ Even if this can be perceived as a stab at Blind's ability to write poetry, the verdict on the volume is not marred by her otherness: 'despite a certain stridulousness of manner and a tendency to abuse rhyme-license, Miss Blind creates the effect of a powerful and passionate mind in tune with "the choral seven"'.⁶⁰ Most importantly, the article, unlike other posthumous reviews, does not deny her the status of a poet: 'Mathilde Blind was certainly a poet'.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Anon., 'Mathilde Blind', *The Academy*, 25 December 1897, 567.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 567.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 567.

⁵⁹ Anon., 'Darwin and the Muse', *Outlook*, 3 February 1900, 24.
Outlook – a weekly general-interest publication.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

Considering the opinions on the poems, this review makes a curious connection between Blind's life and work and the death of her brother Ferdinand:

one can imagine her generous soul afire with thoughts of her heroic but imprudent brother Ferdinand, who, from motives of mistaken patriotism, attempted to kill Bismarck, as she penned some of those burning stanzas where she brings Man to the Bar and condemns him in the face of his agitated creator.⁶²

This connection is an unusual one and suggests that the reviewer must have been to some extent familiar with Blind's biography or knew Blind or one of her friends personally. However, none of the consulted material suggested that Ferdinand's death inspired 'AoM'. What is more, the tone of this passage suggests that its author characterizes Blind as a highly emotional person and, possibly, tries to present her feminine side to balance the more scientific subject of 'AoM'.

Speaking of the responses to the *AoM*, we need to mention another category: readers' replies to the reviews. We first encounter this type of reaction in reply to *The Academy's* review of *A Selection from the Poems of Mathilde Blind* and, unlike the article, the letters represent more positive responses to her poetry. For instance, a letter in reply to the just mentioned review, signed 'J', argues that Blind's poetry has merit: 'Put Mathilde Blind's case as you will, she cannot be dismissed as a woman who went to Parnassus on a vain errand. Her poetry has much more grace; it is charged with emotion; and it is so sincere as to be a relic of her living self.'⁶³ J's letter picks up on the emotional quality and gracefulness of Blind's writing rather than speaking of the more intellectual aspects of her works; however, the letter does not present enough details to understand J's reasoning behind this selection.

⁶² Ibid., 24.

⁶³ J., 'Mathilde Blind's Poetry', *The Academy*, 8 January 1898, 41.

Two more notable letters were printed in response to the collected poetical works printed in 1900 and also in *The Academy*, which might be explained by the direction the periodical took after it was purchased by an American, John Morgan Richards, with Charles Lewis Hind, when ‘it became Britain’s liveliest journal, providing best-seller lists, readers’ contests and short snappy reviews,’ an element that can also account for the fact that these letters were published.⁶⁴ The replies in question present two contrasting perspectives on Blind’s work, one by M. L. Pendered and another by Evelyn Forster and, based on the contents of the letters, it is likely that these accounts represent the opinions of Blind and her work by people who most likely had never met Blind and would not have been as informed about the literary networks to which she belonged and gossip as the reviewer. The first letter criticises *The Academy*’s reviewer for his harsh treatment of Blind’s poems. Pendered writes that Blind’s ‘pedestal does not need a buttressing, but the *woman poet* seems to lack a valiant supporter’ [highlight mine].⁶⁵ It notable that even if Pendered does not ascribe high value to Blind’s work, the letter does not contain any comments that doubt her intellectual capabilities or that she was a well-recognised poet. Combining this with Pendered’s comment that Blind needs a champion we can presume that there was a considerable amount of negative opinion on her work and/or persona in circulation. The letter continues by stating that:

[I]f, as your reviewer says, she has no “high imagination, emotional power or grace of form”, a humble enquirer would like to know why her fame is steadily increasing year by year, and why a writer of such known critical acumen as Dr. Garnett should be found to edit her work.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Kent, ‘Academy’, *Dictionary of Nineteenth-century Journalism*, p. 2.

⁶⁵ M. L. Pendered, ‘Mathilde Blind’, *The Academy*, 16 June 1900, 517.

⁶⁶ Evelyn Forster, ‘Mathilde Blind’, *The Academy*, 16 June 1900, 517.

This observation that Blind's fame is increasing is of considerable importance as it suggests that her reputation was, at least in the beginning, resilient in the face of these posthumous negative reviews. The letter, however, does present its readers with what appears to be a mistake in presuming that Garnett edited Blind's posthumous work, as both volumes were, in fact, edited by Symons. However, as the thesis demonstrated in the previous chapter, Garnett did help Blind with editing, but the way this comment is made suggests that Pendered knew Blind only through her work, as people belonging to Blind's inner circle would know that Garnett and Blind were close friends.

The second letter's tone is more reserved; it does not speak overtly of the quality of Blind's poetry, but indirectly indicates that 'AoM' has not succeeded in adapting evolutionary theory. However, Forster does not deny the poems' worth: 'apart from their own intrinsic value, these poems represent an attempt which has not infrequently been made, to create, as it were, a poetry of science'.⁶⁷ This statement was followed by a question, asking why most poetic renditions of evolution have been unsatisfactory. Forster does not answer the question in her letter but quotes the second canto from Emily Pfeiffer's 'To Nature' as a demonstration of a more successful poetic interpretation of evolution, 'bear[ing] the hall-mark of original thought and expression in every line'.⁶⁸ The stanza included in the letter does indeed bear some resemblance to Blind's perception of nature after reading Darwin, as described in the first chapter, that can be seen in, for example 'Dread force, in whom of old we loved to see / a nursing mother'.⁶⁹ Thus, it is possible that this similarity in perception of nature could have caused Forster to see

⁶⁷ Ibid., 517.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 517.

⁶⁹ Emily Pfeiffer, 'To Nature', *Decadent Verse. An Anthology of Late-Victorian Poetry, 1872-1900*, ed. Carleine Blyth (London: Anthem Press, 2011), ll. 15-16.

Blind's work as unoriginal, especially as the former's poem predated 'AoM'. If we are to read this comment as a hint at Blind's unoriginality, it is not the first time that she was accused of this; *The Athenaeum's* review published in 1889 already hinted at Blind borrowing some of the ideas for 'AoM' from German philosophers. However, unlike *The Athenaeum's* comment, Forster's seems to be stemming not from the intent to hint at Blind's otherness or to present her as a substandard author, but from a position of a larger discussion of the treatment of evolution in literature.

Exploring the contemporary and the posthumous reviews we observe that after Blind's death two elements became dominant in the reviews: her otherness and intellectual unsuitability for writing poetry, especially in connection with such themes as evolution. An example of this can be seen in *The Academy's* review that sparked the two aforementioned letters:

We cannot find any evidence that Miss Blind's "fundamental brain-power" (as Rossetti called it) in poetry exceeded that of numerous female writers less voluminous and less noticed. The impression made upon us is one of ambitious mediocrity-could we find a less harsh term we would use it.⁷⁰

It is probable that comments, like the one above, coupled with hints about otherness affected the posthumous life of Blind's poetry, including *AoM* more than, for example, gender-related stereotypes. Thus, the narrative created by the posthumous reviews presents Blind as yet another woman who feverishly wanted to be seen as a poet and was not intellectually capable of interpreting scientific theories because of her gender, and that her foreignness contributed to Blind's disappearance in the twentieth century.

⁷⁰ Anon., 'Mathilde Blind's Poetry', *The Academy*, 2 June 1900, 473.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to explore the history of Mathilde Blind's *AoM* as well as identify, where possible, the stories behind the individual poems; it focuses on elements from the pre-publication life of the volume, identifies and explores Blind's approach to composition and production, looks at external influences on both, and also pays attention to the material history of the volume, including pricing, and the intellectual influences on the texts. Bearing in mind that Blind is still a relatively unknown poet, a more detailed exploration of the volume's factual underpinnings can be equated to building a solid foundation for future researchers, especially for a potential scholarly edition of this volume. By addressing the origins of *AoM*, the thesis fills in a gap in the current research on it and on Blind's poetry as there are no studies of her poetic collections that provide this kind of detailed study of its intellectual and material contexts.

In order to achieve these results, a variety of archival sources has been consulted, providing insight into the key stages of the volume's life as well as its intellectual contexts. However, the material used was not limited to the documents on *AoM* as one of the main issues with working on Blind's poetry is the gaps in the available sources. These gaps are due, in part, to the rapid decline in her critical reputation following her death, and, in this respect, she illustrates the fate of many writers from marginalised groups. Therefore, to present a more complete picture it was necessary to turn to the surviving records on her other volumes, for example, the C&W archive provided details regarding the publication and advertising of *Songs and Sonnets*, which can be applied to *AoM* in the absence of more solid evidence.

The first chapter's emphasis on Blind's intellectual antecedents is an attempt to illustrate the breadth of her cultural range, but also to counteract the habit of dealing with recovered women writers within an exclusively or largely female tradition. Blind

certainly admired writers like Elizabeth Barrett Browning and George Eliot, but in her work *Blind*, at least in the beginning, aspired to emulate Shelley, and to show that his philosophy was not incompatible with the new world opened up by Darwin's scientific discoveries. The influence of Mazzini, whom *Blind* knew personally, is a reminder of her links to the idealism of the European radical tradition. This section also addresses the question of influence, and draws attention to the fact that a writer's view of an important precursor might change significantly over time. An example of this can be seen in the section on Shelley's effect on *Blind*, where it was important to determine whether *Blind*'s perception of the poet's philosophy or his works changed between 1870 and *Blind*'s lecture on Shelley published a couple of years prior to *AoM*, that demonstrated that *Blind* was moving away from some of his ideas. Knowing these changes allows us to trace the elements of Shelley's oeuvre and philosophy that are echoed in the volume. What is more, the chapter demonstrated that the person who affected *Blind* the most was Mazzini and that his effect extended to *Blind*'s perception of Shelley and Darwin, an element that was unknown prior this thesis.

The second chapter explored factual elements of the volume's life, establishing the timeline for its creation as well as the impact on *Blind*'s friends on creation and publication of *AoM*. Amongst the findings made in this chapter it is important to single out that *Blind* had particular ideas as to word choices in her poetry and how it should be presented, including the volume's cover style and the price. By looking at *Blind*'s poetry and paying attention to its production and composition this thesis uses an approach that is rarely employed in researching lesser known poets and makes it different from the currently published work on *Blind*. Most existing essays or book chapters explore her poetry from a critical standpoint. However, there are no extensive studies in the

intellectual and textual history of one of her works, a gap which this thesis closes. Indeed, usually one finds detailed histories of production and composition in the critical works or scholarly editions of the major poets from the periods such as Christopher Ricks's edition of Alfred Lord Tennyson or Alastair Fowler's edition of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, where the effort put into preparing such a work is justified by the authors' prominence during their life as well as their presence in the literary pantheon. However, by extending this approach to the authors situated on the periphery of the canon one can develop a better comprehension of the period, such as demonstrated by observing Blind's literary friendships and how they have contributed to the development of the volume. In the case of AoM, for example, we are presented with the different perspective on gender relations as well as given additional insight into the production and reception issues of a minor poet's work.

Apart from contributing to the corpus of information on the period, such an approach also brings to light the individual stories of the volumes that help, if not to restore the overlooked authors or works to their proper place in the literary landscape of the period, then at least to alter our existing opinions on them. Speaking of Blind's work, we cannot describe her poetry as even and, based on the results of this thesis, it is unlikely that Blind will take a place amongst the major names of periods such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning or Christina Rossetti. However, detailed research on the volume highlights a number of details presenting *AoM* as more valuable than previously perceived as, amongst other things, it demonstrates a successful conversion of a poet from one culture to another.

Uncovering the history of the volume also leads to establishing a number of points that highlight the uniqueness of the volume and justify further and deeper research

not only of the poems included in it but also extend the same to Blind's other volumes. The first and most obvious point is connected to the assertion included in *The Athenaeum*'s review of the volume, where Wilson argues that the title poem is 'perhaps the earliest embodiment in verse (on any considerable scale)' that incorporates Darwin's ideas. As established, earlier the connection between the title poem and evolutionary theories is habitually perceived as a focal point of the volume, which is present in both the nineteenth-century reviews and contemporary critical essays on the collection. Furthermore, in the course of the research it was established that this same element of the title poem more often than not overshadows the shorter poems, some of which also draw on the same elements, as well as the other themes present in the title poem. Indeed, Blind's reading of evolution, as a process in which violence takes centre stage, is overtly present in the title poem and, even if she does not state it herself, can be traced in decreasing order through the other two parts of the volume. Throughout the second chapter one can see the way in which her interpretation of Darwin's theories and related aspects, the laws of nature and progression of history, stem from the impressions left on her by Mazzini and Shelley, both of whom were pivotal for the formation of Blind's worldview. This amalgamation then results in a unique and valuable example of poetic engagement with Darwin's evolutionary theories.

Another aim of the thesis is to give a stronger sense of the literary and cultural networks to which Blind belonged. Establishing such networks as the result of uncovering the volume's history is beneficial not only for one's knowledge of *AoM*, but also because it provides a starting point for similar explorations of other volumes. The second and third chapters of this thesis identify several more names that belong to the same category as Mazzini; these include Richard Garnett, William and Elizabeth Sharp and Ludwig Mond.

Considering the gender politics of the late-Victorian period, this approach brings out another issue connected not only to *AoM* but also to Blind's poetry more broadly: the treatment of Blind by her male colleagues. Knowing this not only casts light on aspects of Blind's professional life, such as her relationship with Chatto & Windus, but also suggests that late-nineteenth-century literary society had different private and public faces, with instances of cooperation between men and women in private often masked by the hostile and condescending tone adopted in reviews. In exploring these private interactions it can be seen that Blind was treated equally, and the contribution of her friends was of a more supportive and educational type. An example of this would be William Sharp's advice on the pricing of the volume or Garnett's role in looking through the page proofs. Knowing such aspects as the involvement of others in the processes leading up to the published volumes not only demonstrates how strongly Blind was swayed by external authoritative influences but also shows how she was treated by her peers. As her letter to William Rossetti and correspondence with Garnett demonstrate, Blind was not easily swayed by their opinions; she argued her case and had a clear vision of what she wanted to convey in her works. Whereas Rossetti's answer to Blind's letter or the preceding letter are not available, her recorded interaction with Garnett demonstrates that she was treated as an equal if at some times, possibly, as a colleague with less experience. Indeed, the letters demonstrate the cooperation and interaction of peers rather than conforming to stereotypical gender-roles. Similarly, the non-conformity to gendered stereotypes can be seen in the form, scope and theme of the title poem where Blind goes beyond the boundaries that were prescribed for women. Indeed, as demonstrated in the section on the reception of the volume one could observe that some of the reviewers in their total focus on the title poem argued that she chose a theme that

was not appropriate for a woman. Furthermore, based on some of the posthumous reviews of the poems included in *AoM* and obituaries that were attacking Blind's work based on her gender. Whereas there is contemporary evidence that demonstrates the difficulties women writers encountered while attempting to break through in various elements of public spheres, it seems that this did not affect the production and publication of *AoM* during Blind's lifetime.

Some of the reviews published during her lifetime deemed the theme of the title poem as being not exactly appropriate for her gender, as can be seen from the previous chapter, especially in the review from *Nottinghamshire Guardian*.¹ However, after her death one observes a different situation, where critics like Theodore Watts-Dunston, invoke her gender and origin in the discussion of the poems including the ones published in *AoM*. Based on the periodical publications on Blind's death one can conclude that her death created a distinctive divide in the perception of her work. While one cannot be fully sure of the reasons behind such a change, it is possible to state that this was one of the main reasons for her work being pushed to the margins of the late-Victorian poetic legacy. As the previous chapter demonstrated, one of the elements responsible for Blind's disappearance is the re-evaluation that happened after her death, which not only cast doubts on her ability to write in English, but also argued that Blind should not have been a poet and approached such themes as evolution in her work.

Further research questions

There are a number of elements where the research on *AoM* can go based on the material presented in above. Even if the thesis uncovered a range of factual and intellectual aspects that constitute a biography of a poetical volume, there still are areas

¹ See pp. 208-9 for the review.

which were not explored here. Indeed, the material relating to the volume still poses a number of questions which could not be covered in the space provided for one thesis; therefore, this final part of this chapter will briefly pause on the directions of future research on *AoM*.

Apart from producing a scholarly edition of the volume, one of the possibilities is to explore Blind's use of metrical and rhythmical patterns if not in the whole volume than at least in the title poem. It was already mentioned in the thesis that Blind was very interested and knowledgeable in the matters pertaining to prosody which undoubtedly produced an effect on her own work and choice of metre, type of stanza and rhythm.² Indeed, each part of 'AoM' utilises different prosodic patterns and thus adds an additional level of meaning to the existing text. Even if Rudy in his essay and book on Blind attempted to illustrate a possible connection between metre and Darwinian ideas, his study is not as extensive as would be desired because he focuses only on a particular type of meter and a narrow selection from the poem.³

A further direction of research would be to investigate to what degree the information presented in the first chapter of this thesis is applicable to Blind's other volumes and to create a more universal study of the intellectual origins of Blind's poesy. Considering that *AoM* is the medial volume of her poetic career such a study would be beneficial for understanding Blind's intellectual development and thus would greatly contribute to recovery of all of her poetry.

² See p. 120.

³ See p. 118 ff. for more information on Rudy's work.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: List of dates from the commonplace book

The Afterglow — Cimiez. 14 Dec. 1887.
 On the Lighthouse —
 at Antibes — Cimiez. 15 Dec —
 Vence — Cagnes — Cimiez 1 Dec —
 Motherhood — Cimiez 7 May. 1886
 Heart's ease. — Paris 25 June 1888
 Ah, if you knew. — 24 June —
 The Pilgrim Soul. — 22 Sept 1888



Appendix 2: Garnett's Letters with Corrections

Letter 1:

30

Dear ^{Dear} Mathilde,

The ^{the} poetry ^{poetry} in these ^{these} sheets ^{is} is in general ^{very} fine, especially ^{from} from page 42 ^{onwards} onwards. I ^{wish} wish I ^{had} had time ^{to} to point ^{out} out all the beauties ^{that} that have ^{most} most struck ^{me} me, but must ^{be} be content ^{with} with the more ^{useful} useful but ^{less} less agreeable ^{of} of ^{signifying} signifying.

what seems to me the
 faults. These are not of
 great importance, and
 nearly all arise from the
 difficulty of the metre. No
 thing but the exigency of
 rhyme could have made
 you write two such poor lines
 as 4 and 6 on page 35. "Then
 I demand only" on p. 37 will
 never do; "holocaust" is
 only predicable of sacrifice
 by fire, and therefore
 not of the Saint Bartholo-
 mew; the only possible

meaning of "stew" is a
 very unseemly one. If you
 cannot rewrite the stanza
 it will be best to cancel it.
 but it might as well
 the revised comes until
 the revision comes. "gritty"
 on p. 62 is another instance
 of the tyranny of rhyme. "grit-
 my" would have been the
 right word, but it is much
 easier to criticize than to
 amend! On p. 50 "wish" is
 is not a word to my taste:
 in the next "velvet-footed"
 seems to require "lead"
 rather than "call": and

"He also cannot move"; while
 "Heim-fer" is obscure, though
 we could grasp the meaning.
 The whole paragraph however
 is exceedingly beautiful, and
 continues to the end, which
 I venture to think could
 be exceedingly improved by
 omitting the last four lines,
 and altering "And no more
 fight" to "no more". "The
 Pitman Soul" is also very fine;
 its great fault, I think, is the
 super abundance of similes. I
 fear this cannot be altered, but
 I should make a great effort
 to get rid of "which inticed
 the air" on p. 60, and "brambles
 of June" on p. 61. I have corrected

Letter 2:

11
 Dear Mathilde,
 My criticisms in these sheets will not, generally speaking, be very important.
 P. 65, l. 2. I should prefer "bills" to "brechers."
 67, l. 2, 3. I don't like the smoking angels nor "fid-
 letter." Last line, "inexorable" is not a good epithet for "lois." I would suggest "irreducible."
 l. 8 will not scan: "who the needest"? P. 76, l. 9, 10: the
 19, 10 then

The sonnet is very good. I should prefer "impenetrable" to "insuperable" and "main-
 tain" to "retain".

A symbol

P 88 trees cannot possibly be covered
 with the stones. 78, l. 13 ^{crucified}
 is not a dignified word —
 rent? 79, l. 4 is atrociously
 feeble: in the next stanza
 the rhyme of the same word
 should be avoided if possible
 80, l. 6, the clover
 seems to belong to an earlier
 time of year, but perhaps
 I am mistaken. 84 l. 13
 "muzzling" is appropriate to
 the rain, not to the roof
 101, l. 7 & 8 the comparison of
 the leaf to the bird is not very
 happy: could "unheard"
 unheard

P. 87
 figure / as figure

Sower

brought ^{be} in? I suppose ³³ I suppose
 this fine poem is inspired ^{his} by Millet's ^{the} picture, and ^{is} ^{inspired}
 should be almost inclined ^{to} to place ^{place} the artist's ^{name} name
 in brackets after the ^{title} title. 107, l. 4 has ^{was} gone
 any scent? I do not ^{do} ^{new}
 like "Lambent" in the ⁱⁿ
 last line, but can ^{but} ^{can} suggest
 just nothing better. "The
 Music: Lepus" is the ^{music} ^{beautiful} most
 beautiful lyric ^{book} in the ^{so} ^{for} ^{and} ^{deserves}
 book so far, and deserves
 to be made ^{made} ^{just} ^{perfect} perfect. I
 do not ^{do} ^{not} ^{can} ^{denounce} ^{come} ^{tricked}
 If it is ^{is} a misprint ^{for} for

"trickled" ^{trickled} ^{chd} ^{his} ^{will} ^{not} this will not
 do, ^{do} ^{for} ^{trickling} ^{denote} for trickling denotes
 smallness ^{smallness} and fubbleness ^{fubbleness}.
 "Rang" ^{Rang} or ^{pealed} "pealed" ^{would} ^{do} ^{and} ^I ^{would} ^{insert} would
 do; and I would insert ^{he} ^{before} ^{blossoming} "the" before "blossoming."
 Apple-blossom ^{Apple - blossom} is ^{is} ^{quite} quite
 out of place ^{out} ^{place} for ^{for} ^{thrushes} thrushes
 do not ^{do} ^{not} build ^{build} ^{ld} ⁱⁿ ^{apple-trees} in apple-
 trees, ^{trush} ^{and} ^{the} ^{blossom} and the blossom
 would, ^{would} ^{generally} ^{speaking} generally speaking
 be ^{be} ^{over} ^{by} ^{not} ^{The} over by May. "The
 sweet ^{sweet} ^{blossom} blossom" "fragrant
 blossom" ^{blossom} ^{sprang} ^{and} ^{blossom} "sprang and blos-
 som" ^{masking} "masking" ^a ^{veiling} or "veiling
 blossom ^{blossom} ^{might} ^{pays} ^{but} ^{none} might pass, but none
 of them ^{of} ^{them} ^{seems} ^{exactly} ^{the} ^{right} seems exactly the right thing
 names ever N. Sarnett.

N. Sarnett.

Letter 3:

Dear Mathilde
 Dear Mathilde,
 Most of the poems in
 these new sheets are very beautiful. "The Teamster"
 the finest in the book so far; and one cannot too highly prize "Apple-Gathering," "A Highland Village," "Autumn Sunset" and "Caper." I fear there is a fatal objection to "A Forsaken Lark's Nest" that the lark's eggs are hatched.

long before
 long before harvest, and
 that the incident, therefore,
 could never happen at all.
 The cock, however, has two
 broods in the year, and it
 is possible that the second
 may not be hatched till
 late summer. I will try
 to ascertain. The last
 line must be altered at
 any rate: a moment's
 reflection will convince
 you that eggs only wither
 in the bud in the king-
 dom of Ireland. "Precious
 Prec

p. 129. l. 10, is ^{it} not the right
^{epithet} epithet, it ^{it} means ^{prematurely} pre-
^{ripe} maturely ripe, but ^{these} these apples
^{have} have never ^{never} ripened. The
^{poppies} poppies and the ^{the} corn in
^{August} "Autumn Tints" are ^{not} out
^{of} of keeping ^{keeping} with ^{the} the rest
^{of} of the picture. I am hardly
^{at} a ^{season} season of a seaman to cir-
^{plew} clew "leeward" ⁱⁿ in the ^{last} last
^{movement} movement, but ^{but} as ^{as} it ^{it} means
^{opposite} opposite ^{to} to the ^{wind} wind, and
^{if} if the ^{wind} wind were ^{were} blowing
^{from} from the ^{see} sea would ^{would} bring
^{the} the vessel ^{of} of ^{upon} upon the rocks,

^{I hardly think it can be}
^{right.} ^{The eighth line of}
^{green leaves and fore.}
^{is very weak, but the}
^{constraint of rhyme}
^{is very strong!} ^{This is}
^{all I can find to say.}
 Yours always,

N. Garretts.